



Hiram Rhoades Revels
First African American United State Senator
January 20, 1870 – March 3, 1871

Hiram Rhoades Revels was the first African American United States Senator, filling the seat left vacant by Jefferson Davis in 1861 when Mississippi seceded from the Union.

Born in the 1820s in Fayetteville, North Carolina, Hiram Revels was the son of free parents of mixed African American and Native American ancestry. Revels moved with his family to Lincolnton, North Carolina in 1842 where he became a barber. Two years later, he left the South and enrolled at Beech Grove Seminary, a Quaker institution near Liberty, Indiana. In 1845, he entered Darke County (Ohio) Seminary for Negroes. The same year Revels was ordained a minister in a Baltimore African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. In the early 1850s, he married Phoebe A. Bass of Zanesville, Ohio, and together they had six children.

Hiram Revels traveled across Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, Missouri, Maryland, Kentucky and Tennessee, preaching to both free and enslaved African Americans. He moved his ministry to an AME church in St. Louis in 1853, but moved again after only a year due to a dispute with the local bishop. Revels ultimately left the AME denomination and enrolled at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois for two years (1857-1858). He then returned to Baltimore where he was appointed the first African American pastor of the Madison Street Presbyterian Church, a position he held until 1863. Between 1863 and 1865, Revels served as a chaplain in the Union Army and helped recruit and organize black Union Army work battalions in Maryland and Missouri. He also founded a black high school in St. Louis and several churches.

After the Civil War, he continued traveling, preaching in Leavenworth, Kansas; Louisville, Kentucky; and New Orleans, Louisiana. On June 1868, Revels became the presiding elder at a church in Natchez, Mississippi, and shortly thereafter, he was appointed to the city board of aldermen.

As a prominent, highly educated African American, Revels was encouraged by many to seek higher office. He ran for the Adams county seat in the state senate in late 1869 as a Republican and easily won as a result of the large majority of African Americans who had recently gained the right to vote during Reconstruction.

Supported by Mississippi's black legislators, Revels was elected in January 1870 by the Republican-dominated Mississippi state legislature to fill the unexpired US Senate seat of Jefferson Davis. After acrimonious debate on February 25, 1870 over whether to accept his credentials, the United States Senate voted 48 to 8 to seat Revels. One month later, he took his seat among the senators. Although Revels served only until the end of the term on March 3, 1871, he nonetheless became the nation's first African American senator.

Hiram Revels introduced three bills while serving as senator of Mississippi, one of which passed. The successful bill was a petition for the removal of political and civil disabilities from an ex-Confederate official. As a proponent of amnesty for ex-Confederates, Revels received some criticism from the black community.

After completing his term, Revels returned to Mississippi. He was a co-founder of Alcorn University 1872. Revels served as its first president of the University until 1873 when he was appointed Mississippi's Secretary of State. Revels returned to the Alcorn presidency shortly after, but came into conflict with Republican Governor Adelbert Ames who asked him to resign. Student and faculty supported Revels as president, however, and he was reappointed in 1876. Revels resigned again in 1882 as a result of poor health and the institution's financial troubles. Revels moved to Holly Springs, Mississippi where he continued to teach and minister. He died of a stroke on January 16, 1901 while attending the Upper Mississippi Conference of the A.M.E. Church then meeting in Aberdeen, Mississippi.

Source:

"Hiram Rhoades Revels," in Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds., *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982).

BLACK HISTORY MONTH: Did You Know?



Phillips, born Velvlea Rodgers, on Feb 18, 1924 and grew up on Milwaukee's south side and graduated from North Division High School. She received a national scholarship to attend Howard University, where she earned a bachelor of arts degree. In 1951, she was the first Black woman to graduate from the University of Wisconsin Law School. Five years later, Phillips became the first woman alderman elected to the Common Council of Milwaukee. She fought tirelessly for fair housing policies to protect minorities from discrimination when buying or renting homes. She was active in the League of Women Voters and the NAACP, and she participated in many non-violent demonstrations for civil rights. With Father James Groppi, the advisor to the NAACP Youth Council, she brought national attention to Milwaukee's civil rights movement when she organized community members to demonstrate for more than 200 days in support of fair housing legislation.

In 1953, Phillips ran for a seat on the school board of the Milwaukee Public Schools, and was the first black candidate to make it past the non-partisan citywide primary election, though she lost the runoff. Both she and her husband became active locally in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in support of a city redistricting referendum (there were at that time no black members of Milwaukee's Common Council). In 1956, Phillips became the first woman and the first African-American member of the Common Council in Milwaukee; since Common Council members were called "Alderman," she was given the title "Madam Alderman" by local officials. She would remain the only woman and only black member of that body for many years to come. Phillips frequently participated in nonviolent civil rights protests against discrimination in housing, education, and employment during the 1960s. Phillips first proposed an ordinance in 1962 to outlaw housing discrimination. In 1968 the Milwaukee Common Council approved a desegregation law, only after a federal housing law was passed. She was arrested at a rally following the firebombing of an NAACP office, the only city official to be arrested during the "long hot summer" of 1967, bringing further national media attention to the city.

Phillips resigned from the Common Council in 1971, when appointed to the judiciary, the first woman judge in Milwaukee County and the first African American judge in Wisconsin. She lost her bid for reelection to the bench to a white candidate who made an issue of her involvement in protests and civil rights activities. She subsequently served as a lecturer at UW–Milwaukee and a visiting professor at Carroll College and UW–Madison Law School.

In 1978, Phillips made history as the first woman and first non-white elected Secretary of State in Wisconsin (although Glenn M. Wise had been *appointed* Secretary of State of Wisconsin 23 years earlier). Incumbent Democratic Secretary of State Doug La Follette ran unsuccessfully for Lieutenant Governor and Phillips won the highly fractured nine-candidate Democratic primary with just 25.6%, though she did finish more than 10% ahead of the second-place candidate, Native American advocate and scholar Ada Deer.^[1] In the general election, she defeated Republican Frederic A. Seefeldt with 50.4% of the vote. During the absence of both the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, under Wisconsin law she briefly served as Acting Governor (she later joked that "the men hurried back" when they realized they had left a woman in charge).^[2] Although Phillips lost the Democratic primary in 1982 (to La Follette, who took 51.1% to Deer's 30.9% and Phillips' 12.4%^[3]), she was the highest-ranking woman to win state office in Wisconsin in the 20th century. A lifelong Democrat, she was also the first black to be elected as a member of the National Committee of either of the major U.S. political parties.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH
Did You Know?



Nelson Mandela
Released from
Prison
February 11, 1990

Nelson Mandela, leader of the movement to end South African apartheid, is released from prison after 27 years on February 11, 1990.

In 1944, Mandela, a lawyer, joined the African National Congress (ANC), the oldest black political organization in South Africa, where he became a leader of Johannesburg's youth wing of the ANC. In 1952, he became deputy national president of the ANC, advocating nonviolent resistance to apartheid—South Africa's institutionalized system of white supremacy and racial segregation. However, after the massacre of peaceful black demonstrators at Sharpeville in 1960, Nelson helped organize a paramilitary branch of the ANC to engage in guerrilla warfare against the white minority government.

In 1961, he was arrested for treason, and although acquitted he was arrested again in 1962 for illegally leaving the country. Convicted and sentenced to five years at Robben Island Prison, he was put on trial again in 1964 on charges of sabotage. In June 1964, he was convicted along with several other ANC leaders and sentenced to life in prison.

Mandela spent the first 18 of his 27 years in jail at the brutal Robben Island Prison. Confined to a small cell without a bed or plumbing, he was forced to do hard labor in a quarry. He could write and receive a letter once every six months, and once a year he was allowed to meet with a visitor for 30 minutes. However, Mandela's resolve remained unbroken, and while remaining the symbolic leader of the anti-apartheid movement, he led a movement of civil disobedience at the prison that coerced South African officials into drastically improving conditions on Robben Island. He was later moved to another location, where he lived under house arrest.

In 1989, F.W. de Klerk became South African president and set about dismantling apartheid. De Klerk lifted the ban on the ANC, suspended executions, and in February 1990 ordered the release of Nelson Mandela.

Mandela subsequently led the ANC in its negotiations with the minority government for an end to apartheid and the establishment of a multiracial government. In 1993, Mandela and de Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. One year later, the ANC won an electoral majority in the country's first free elections, and Mandela was elected South Africa's president.

Mandela retired from politics in 1999, but remained a global advocate for peace and social justice until his death in December 2013.

From "This Day In History"



Rosa Parks –*Beyond the Elementary School Curriculum*
FROM--THE REBELLIOUS LIFE OF MRS. ROSA PARKS
Author: Jeanne Theoharis

Born on February 4, 1913 in Tuskegee, AL, Rosa Parks was raised by her mother and grandparents in Pine Level, Alabama. Her grandfather supported the Garvey movement and, when Klan violence escalated after World War I, would sit out on the porch with his shotgun to protect the family home. A 6-year-old Rosa would sometimes sit vigil with him. Rosa McCauley was a shy young woman but she had a feisty side, picking up a brick when a white bully threatened her and her brother and pushing back when a white boy pushed her. Her grandmother worried about her granddaughter's determined spirit and her ways of "talking biggety to white folks." An older Rosa Parks recounted how her grandmother grew very angry when a young Rosa told her about the brick incident and worried for her safety. Rosa told her grandmother: "I would rather be lynched than live to be mistreated than not be allowed to say 'I don't like it.'"

Rosa Parks framed the power of speaking back as fundamental. Full personhood required the option "to say 'I don't like it,'" and key to the functioning of white supremacy was shutting down the right and space to assert this. Nonetheless, Parks' "determination never to accept it, even if it must be endured" led her to "search for a way of working for freedom and first class citizenship."

Rosa Parks was not the meek seamstress that she is often portrayed to be. And her role in the black freedom struggle far surpassed the courageous stand she made on a Montgomery bus on December 1, 1955. One of the guiding issues of Rosa Parks' life was justice, and she spent a lifetime challenging the multiple injustices of the law used to criminalize black life, support segregation, break black protest and maintain white brutality against black people. Even her refusal to give up her seat on the bus was in part a challenge to a system that did not value black life or black rights, coming on the heels of the acquittal of the two men who had lynched Emmett Till.

Yet this has not been how the story of Rosa Parks has been taught. The Rosa Parks most people learn about and think they know is a quiet and passive woman who was simply tired on a bus one day. Rosa Parks is too often trapped on the bus, relegated to the distant past, reduced to a single moment of courage rather than her "life history of being rebellious," as she herself put it. Yet, criminal justice was a key through-line in her six decades of political work: from her work alongside her husband Raymond on the Scottsboro case in the 1930s; to her decade of NAACP work before the boycott attempting to find justice for black women who had been raped, provide support for wrongfully-accused black men, and document white brutality against black people.

On December 1, 1955, when bus driver James Blake ordered her to move from her seat, she thought about Emmett Till and feeling “pushed as far as she could be pushed” refused. Her act sparked a yearlong bus boycott—and 89 community leaders including Parks were arrested for their roles in it. Eight months after the boycott’s successful end, the Parks, who had lost their jobs during the boycott and still could not find work, moved to Detroit. There she spent the next half century challenging the racism of the North, in schools, housing, jobs and particularly criminal justice—protesting police brutality, joining various prisoner defense committees, and continuing to challenge the mistreatment of black people under the law.