

Blanche K. Bruce

Senator



Blanche K. Bruce was born a slave on March 1, 1841, near Farmville, Virginia. As a child, he worked as a field hand and printer's apprentice and was taught to read and write by his master's son. Bruce moved with his master's family to Mississippi and Missouri but was able to escape from slavery at the start of the Civil War.

Bruce attempted to join the Union Army and fight in the Civil War but was denied entry. Instead, he found work as a Mississippi River steamboat porter. In 1864, he began Missouri's first school for African Americans in Hannibal.

In 1869, Bruce moved back to Mississippi and began his career in politics. He was elected to several local offices and became the most well-known African American political leader in Mississippi. In 1874, he was elected to the United States Senate by the predominantly white Republican legislature of Mississippi. With this historic election, Bruce became the first African American senator to serve a full term. Bruce was elected to three senatorial committees and in 1879, he also became the first African American to run a Senate session. Bruce focused his senatorial term on efforts to secure rights for African Americans and Native Americans. Bruce's senatorial term ended in 1881, and he was not re-elected.

Bruce was later offered a position as Minister to Brazil. He did not accept this offer because Brazil still practiced slavery. However, he was appointed to other governmental positions and served in these capacities for many years.

Bruce died in 1898 in Washington, D.C.

Activities

1. Research the other governmental positions Bruce held.
2. List the names and terms of other African Americans who have been elected to the U.S. Senate. How many African Americans serve in the current Senate?