



Jefferson Franklin Long

1836–1901

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE ★ 1871
REPUBLICAN FROM GEORGIA

The second African American elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, Jefferson Long served less than three months—the shortest term of any African-American Member—but nevertheless became the first black Member to speak on the House Floor.¹ Speaking against the Amnesty Bill, which restored political rights to most former Confederates, Long pleaded with his colleagues to acknowledge the atrocities being committed by white supremacists in Georgia. “Do we, then, really propose here to-day . . . when loyal men dare not carry the ‘stars and stripes’ through our streets . . . to relieve from political disability the very men who have committed these Kuklux [*sic*] outrages?” he declared on the House Floor. “I think that I am doing my duty to my constituents and my duty to my country when I vote against such a proposition.”²

Jefferson Long was born to a slave mother on March 3, 1836, in Knoxville, a small town in west-central Georgia. Long’s father was believed to have been the son of a local white man.³ Defying the law, Long learned to read and write. Trained as a tailor, he opened a successful business in Macon, Georgia, after his emancipation following the end of the Civil War. Most of his clients were white, as they were the only rural Georgians able to afford custom-made clothing.⁴ Shortly after the war, Long married Lucinda Carhart, and they raised seven children. One of Long’s sons helped run his business.

Unlike neighboring South Carolina, Georgia did not have a majority-black population, or a large antebellum free black community. As a result, Georgia freedmen often looked to white politicians as leaders after the war. Long was an exception.⁵ His prosperous tailor shop catered to politically connected clients and provided him the resources to become involved in Republican politics. Starting in 1866, Long began promoting literacy among African Americans, and in 1867, he became active in the

Georgia Educational Association, formed to protect and advance the interests of freedmen. Long also belonged to the Macon Union League, a grass-roots political action group. A dazzling orator, he introduced Georgian freedmen to politics by preaching the virtues of the Republican Party. While traveling the state, organizing local Republican branches, and encouraging black voters to register, Long brought many whites into the Republican fold. In 1869, he served on the Republican state committee and was a leader in the Georgia Labor Convention, which organized black agricultural workers to demand increased wages, better jobs, and improved working conditions.⁶

Congress delayed Georgia’s re-entry into the Union because the state legislature refused to ratify the 14th Amendment, and white Republicans and Conservatives expelled 29 legally elected black members from the Georgia legislature in September 1868. Conditions for readmission included reseating the black members and ratification of the 15th Amendment. In July 1870, these terms were agreed to, and a Georgia delegation was permitted to return to Congress. A special election to fill the delegation’s seats for the remainder of the 41st Congress (1869–1871) was set for the same day—December 20, 1870—as the election for a full term to the 42nd Congress (1871–1873). The Georgia Republican Party chose black candidates to run for the abbreviated terms, reserving the full term for white candidates. In the state’s central district, the party nominated Long for the 41st Congress and state senator Thomas Jefferson Speer for the 42nd Congress. The night before the election, Long gave a series of speeches across the district, encouraging black voters to support the Republican ticket. The following day, he rallied a large number of blacks from Macon and marched with them to the polls. Armed whites were waiting, and a riot broke out. Long was unharmed, but four others were killed, and



most blacks left the polls without voting. The unusual election lasted three days. White politicians accused blacks of voting multiple times and spread rumors that African Americans from South Carolina and Alabama had crossed state lines to vote. But despite the election's inconsistencies, Long defeated his opponent, Democrat Winburn J. Lawton, garnering 12,867 votes (53 percent). However, he was not sworn in until January 16, 1871, because of complications related to Georgia's readmission to the Union.⁷ Long took his seat one month after Representative Joseph Rainey of South Carolina was seated in the House.

Long's term was so short he was not assigned to any committees, yet he was determined to fight for the civil rights of freed slaves. On February 1, 1871, he became the first African-American Representative to speak before the House when he disagreed with a bill that exempted former Confederate politicians from swearing allegiance to the Constitution.⁸ Long argued against allowing unrepentant Confederates to return to Congress, noting that many belonged to secret societies like the Ku Klux Klan, which intimidated black citizens, and feigned loyalty to rebuild political strength. "If this House removes the disabilities of disloyal men," Long warned, "I venture to prophesy you will again have trouble from the very same men who gave you trouble before."⁹ Many major newspapers reported on Long's address, and northern newspapers, especially, commended his oratorical skills. Georgia newspapers described his speech as a malicious attempt to disfranchise whites.¹⁰ Long's efforts were fruitless; the House voted 118 to 90 to grant Confederates amnesty.

One of the few votes Long cast in the House was to seat Thomas P. Beard, a black Republican from northeast Georgia, after his defeat by Democrat Stephen Corker. Led by Massachusetts Republican Benjamin Butler, a few Radical Republicans, Long among them, objected

to seating Corker when he presented his credentials on January 24, 1871. (The Beard–Corker election equaled Long's for its violence. Beard testified that large numbers of voters who had intended to vote for him were "shot, beat or otherwise maltreated" by "organized bands of desperadoes [*sic*]," connected to the Democrats.) Butler's resolution objecting to Corker's credentials was soundly defeated in a 148 to 42 vote.¹¹ A number of Republicans voted against it on procedural grounds, believing Corker's credentials qualified him to remain seated until the Elections Committee ruled on the case. Beard's case never came before the panel, and Corker served out the term.¹²

Long was the last black Representative elected from Georgia until Representative Andrew Young won a seat in 1972. After leaving Congress on March 3, 1871, Long returned to his tailoring business in Macon. Although he remained active in politics, he never again ran for public office, recognizing that the white-controlled Georgia government had shut blacks out of politics. He campaigned for Republican candidates in 1872 and served as a member of the Southern Republican Convention in 1874 and as a delegate to the Republican National Conventions from 1872 to 1880. Long eventually became frustrated by white Republican leaders' failure to protect black southerners. By the late 1870s, he began encouraging African Americans to vote for Independent Democrats if Republican candidates proved unsatisfactory.¹³ Political upheaval and sharp racial division in all the political parties had so disillusioned Long by the mid-1880s that he left politics permanently to focus on his business. However, his reputation as a radical politician eventually cost him his affluent white clientele.¹⁴ Unable to survive on the income from his tailor shop, he started other businesses, including a liquor store and a dry-cleaning shop. He remained self-employed until his death in Macon on February 4, 1901.

FOR FURTHER READING

Drago, Edmund L. *Black Politicians and Reconstruction Georgia: A Splendid Failure*, 2nd edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992).

“Long, Jefferson Franklin,” *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=L000419>.

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

Atlanta History Center (Atlanta, GA) *Papers*: In the Long–Rucker–Aiken Family Portraits and Personal Images, dates unknown; approximately 1,117 photographs. Subjects include Jefferson Long.

NOTES

- 1 John Willis Menard of Louisiana was elected to the House in 1868, but the election was contested, and Menard was unseated upon his arrival. His speech defending his right to his seat marked the first time an African American addressed the U.S. House from the floor.
- 2 *Congressional Globe*, House, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (1 February 1871): 882.
- 3 Maurine Christopher, *Black Americans in Congress* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976): 27. The names of Long’s parents are not known.
- 4 Eric Foner, *Freedom’s Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 136.
- 5 Edmund L. Drago, *Black Politicians and Reconstruction in Georgia: A Splendid Failure* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992): xi–xii.
- 6 Foner, *Freedom’s Lawmakers*: 136.
- 7 Michael J. Dubin et al., *U.S. Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 213–214; *Congressional Globe*, House, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (16 January 1871): 530.
- 8 *Congressional Globe*, House, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (1 February 1871): 881–882.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 882.
- 10 Samuel Denny Smith, *The Negro in Congress* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1940): 73–74.
- 11 *Congressional Globe*, House, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (24 January 1871): 703–707.
- 12 The fact that Beard’s case is not recorded in Chester H. Rowell’s *A Historical and Legal Digest of All Contested Election Cases* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1901), strongly suggests the Committee on Elections never heard the case. Michael Dubin reports that Corker handily defeated “Simeon W. Beard” with 62 percent of the vote. This is likely a misprint. See Dubin et al., *U.S. Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 214. (Simeon Beard was an active black politician in Georgia in the early 1870s. See “Bullock’s Last Dodge,” 27 March 1870, *Atlanta Constitution*: 1.) It is unclear whether the two Beards were related.
- 13 John M. Matthews, “Long, Jefferson Franklin,” *American National Biography* 13 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 875–876.
- 14 Foner, *Freedom’s Lawmakers*: 136.