Rainey, Joseph Hayne


The son of a barber who bought the family's freedom, Rainey received some private schooling and took up his father's trade in Charleston, S.C. During the American Civil War he was forced to work on the fortifications in Charleston harbour but managed to escape to the West Indies, where he remained until the end of the war (1865). Upon his return to South Carolina, he was a delegate to the state constitutional convention (1868) and served briefly in the state Senate before his election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1870. He was reelected four times, the longest tenure in the House of any black during the Reconstruction era. While in office he dedicated himself to the passage of civil-rights legislation, pressing the interests not only of blacks but of other minorities such as the Indians and the Chinese in California. Upon leaving the House in 1879, he was appointed U.S. internal revenue agent of South Carolina. He resigned that post in 1881 to engage in banking and brokerage enterprises in Washington, D.C.