

Historical Quotations

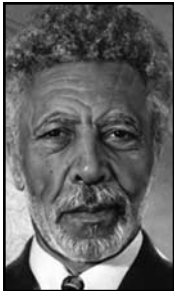
BLACK AMERICANS IN CONGRESS SPEAK THEIR MIND



Joseph Hayne Rainey
U.S. Representative, 1870–1879
Republican from South Carolina

“We [Black Americans] are earnest in our support of the Government. We are earnest in the house of the nation’s perils and dangers; and now, in our country’s comparative peace and tranquility, we are earnest for our rights.”

— REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPH HAYNE RAINEY
Black Americans in Congress, page 64



Ronald V. Dellums
U.S. Representative, 1971–1998
Democrat from California

“To get up every day and put on your uniform and put on your tie and march on the floor of Congress knowing that, in your hands, in that card, in your very being, you have life and death in your hands, it is an incredible thing.”

— REPRESENTATIVE RONALD V. DELLUMS
Black Americans in Congress, page 420



Robert Smalls
U.S. Representative, 1875–1879;
1882–1883; 1884–1887
Republican from South Carolina

“My race needs no special defense, for the past history of them in this country proves them to be equal of any people anywhere. All they need is an equal chance in the battle of life.”

— REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT SMALLS
Black Americans in Congress, page 138

“I’ve always got my mouth open, sometimes my foot is in it, but it is always open. It serves a purpose; it digs at the white man’s conscience.”

— REPRESENTATIVE ADAM CLAYTON POWELL, JR.
Black Americans in Congress, page 261

“I am not going into Congress as a Negro with a chip on my shoulder thinking I am of an inferior race and that every man’s hand is against me. I am going in as an American citizen, entitled to my rights, no more, no less, and I shall insist on them. I’m going as the representative of all the people of my district.”

— REPRESENTATIVE ARTHUR WERGS MITCHELL
Black Americans in Congress, page 288

“If [an African American] is a man, he is entitled to *all* the rights and privileges of any other man. There can be no grades of citizenship under the American flag.”

— REPRESENTATIVE JOHN ADAMS HYMAN
Black Americans in Congress, page 128

“I could just stand on the side and be a spectator. But politics is not a spectator sport. And in Washington, it’s a contact sport. I don’t play to tie, I try to play to win. But you can only win if you are in the game.”

— REPRESENTATIVE KWEISI MFUME
Black Americans in Congress, pages 571-572



Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.
U.S. Representative, 1945–1967;
1967–1971
Democrat from New York



Arthur Wergs Mitchell
U.S. Representative, 1935–1943
Democrat from Illinois



John Adams Hyman
U.S. Representative, 1875–1877
Republican from North Carolina



Kweisi Mfume
U.S. Representative, 1987–1996
Democrat from Maryland



Edward William Brooke III
United States Senator, 1967–1979
Republican from Massachusetts

“In every regard, we were treated as second-class soldiers, if not worse, and we were angry. I felt a personal frustration and bitterness I had not known before in my life.”

— SENATOR EDWARD WILLIAM BROOKE III
Black Americans in Congress, page 332



Shirley A. Chisholm
U.S. Representative, 1969–1983
Democrat from New York

“The black man must step forward, but that doesn’t mean that black women have to step back.”

— REPRESENTATIVE SHIRLEY A. CHISHOLM
Black Americans in Congress, page 239



Parren James Mitchell
U.S. Representative, 1971–1987
Democrat from Maryland

“If you believe in fighting racism, you make a commitment for the rest of your life. There’s no getting off that train. You can’t say, ‘I’ve put five years in fighting racism and now I am finished.’ No, you are not finished. Our job is to fight it every day, to continue to shove it down and when it rises up to shove it down even harder.”

— REPRESENTATIVE PARREN JAMES MITCHELL
Black Americans in Congress, page 434



William Herbert (Bill) Gray III
U.S. Representative, 1979–1991
Democrat from Pennsylvania

“We have a group of new members whose strategies were shaped in the post-civil rights movement—who use leverage within the system. We see ourselves not as civil rights leaders, but as legislators.”

— REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM HERBERT (BILL) GRAY III
Black Americans in Congress, page 370

“I regret, sir, that the dark hue of my skin may lend a color to the imputation that I am controlled by motives personal to myself in my advocacy of this great measure of national justice. The motive that impels me is restricted to no such boundary, but is as broad as your Constitution. I advocate it because it is right.”

— REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT BROWN ELLIOTT
Black Americans in Congress, page 81

“The leadership belongs not to the loudest, not to those who beat the drums or blow the trumpets, but to those who day in and day out, in all seasons, work for the practical realization of a better world—those who have the stamina to persist and remain dedicated.”

— REPRESENTATIVE AUGUSTUS FREEMAN (GUS) HAWKINS
Black Americans in Congress, page 324

“I’m going to keep on denouncing the inequities of this system, but I’m going to work within it. To go outside the system would be to deny myself—to deny my own existence. I’ve beaten the system. I’ve proved it can be done—so have a lot of others. But the problem is that a black man has to be extra special to win in this system. Why should you have to be a super black to get someplace? That’s what’s wrong in the society. The ordinary black man doesn’t have the same chance as the ordinary white man does.”

— REPRESENTATIVE LOUIS STOKES
Black Americans in Congress, page 354

“This, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps the negroes’ temporary farewell to the American Congress. But let me say, Phoenix-like he will rise up someday and come again.”

— REPRESENTATIVE GEORGE HENRY WHITE
Black Americans in Congress, page 228



Robert Brown Elliott
U.S. Representative, 1871–1874
Republican from South Carolina



Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins
U.S. Representative, 1963–1991
Democrat from California



Louis Stokes
U.S. Representative, 1969–1999
Democrat from Ohio



George Henry White
U.S. Representative, 1897–1901
Republican from North Carolina