

Blanche K. Bruce

1841–1898



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Blanche K. Bruce was an African American senator who represented the state of Mississippi during the Reconstruction period. He made important contributions to politics, education, and rights for African Americans.



As you read the biography below, think about how Blanche K. Bruce's ability to cooperate with people on opposite sides of an issue led him to be successful in attaining his goals.



Library of Congress

Political movements often require someone to bridge the gap between people with opposing views. Blanche K. Bruce was one such organizer.

Bruce was born a slave in Virginia and was raised in Missouri. When slavery was abolished in Missouri during the Civil War, Bruce opened the first school for African Americans in the state. After the war, Bruce moved to Mississippi where he worked to organize freed slaves who were working on plantations so that they could gain the rights that they deserved. Bruce's efforts as a Republican organizer led him to be elected to several different offices in the local government.

In 1871 Bruce was appointed as superintendent of education for Bolivar County, Mississippi. This position held a lot of power in local government. Bruce did not miss the opportunity to make an impact. He created free public schools that, although segregated, were a major advancement in the education of African Americans.

The Reconstruction period was difficult for all African Americans. White planters throughout the

VOCABULARY

compromise an agreement in which both sides agree to give up something in order to achieve a goal

South were upset because they believed that African Americans were being given too many rights.

Bruce saw his opportunity to become involved in politics on a much larger scale. He began his run for the U.S. Senate. Bruce was able to reduce the planters' opposition to Reconstruction changes. At the same time, he also appealed to more radical Republicans. Bruce was often able to get opposing factions to **compromise** on an issue.

In March 1875, Bruce began his term in the U.S. Senate. There were two vacant senate seats from Mississippi—one was for the rest of Jefferson Davis's unexpired term, and the other was for a full six-year term. Bruce won the full term.

After serving out his term, Bruce continued to urge African Americans to become educated. He believed education and self-determination was the best way for African Americans to gain equality.

While some critics say that Bruce was not outspoken enough on the issue of African American rights, others believe that his ability to walk a fine line between both sides of an issue allowed him to make great steps toward achieving equality for African Americans.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Why might it be significant that Blanche K. Bruce was elected to the full term as senator rather than the partial term?

- 2. Evaluate** Do you think the ability to compromise is important to a political leader? Provide reasons or examples to support your point of view.

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Write a campaign speech to elect Blanche K. Bruce to the U.S. Senate. Use powerful words and descriptions to make your speech interesting.