

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

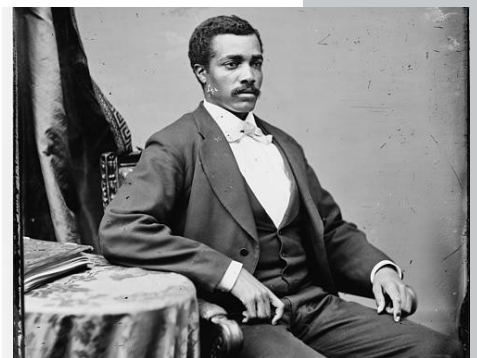
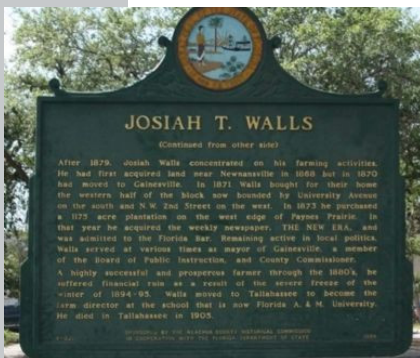
A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #2: Josiah T. Walls

Shortly after the Civil War, during the [Reconstruction Era](#), Florida elected its first Black congressman. His name was Josiah T. Walls. Josiah was born into slavery in 1842 near Winchester, Virginia. After he was liberated by the Union Army during the Civil War, he joined the [United States Colored Troops](#) and after his discharge from the Army, settled in Alachua County, Florida. From 1868 to 1871, Josiah served as a delegate to the [state constitutional convention](#), was elected to the Florida House of Representatives, and then later the Florida Senate. In 1870, Josiah Walls was nominated as the Republican candidate for Florida's one at-large congressional seat. The Republican Party at the time was very divided and it would take 11 ballots before Walls was chosen. Despite winning the congressional seat for Florida in the 1870, 1872, and 1874 elections, Congressman Walls constantly faced adversity and had to fight for his spot. Twice, in [1870](#) and [1874](#), his opponents contested the election results with the House Committee on Elections and he was unseated. Well-spoken and passionate, Josiah Walls referred to Florida as "my own sunny state" and spent his time in Congress fighting for his constituents, funds for tourism and farming, protections for Florida's orchards, and the need for quality public education. After losing re-election in 1876, Josiah Walls would go on to serve as Mayor of Gainesville and a member of the Alachua County Commission. He also practiced law, ran a large farm, and established a newspaper. Josiah would spend the last years of his life working at the state's agricultural college, today known as Florida A&M University. After Josiah Walls' time in Congress, the state of Florida would have to wait another 118 years for the election of its [next African-American](#) to Congress.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- Why would Florida have only one at-large U.S. representative when Josiah Walls was first elected in 1870? What changed to give [Florida its current 27 seats in the US House of Representatives](#)?
- What are some qualities of Josiah Walls that you think made him an electable candidate for political office?



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