




George Thompson Ruby

African American Leader

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George T. Ruby (1841–1882) was an African American state senator from Texas at a time when civil rights were just becoming a popular issue. His work with civil rights and labor unions was critical to the development of Texas.

George T. Ruby was born in New York in 1841. Although he was considered African American, some historians believe he was of mixed race. While he was still very young, his family moved to Portland, Maine, where he was educated in the liberal arts. He then traveled to the island of Haiti in the Caribbean and worked as a reporter for a New England antislavery newspaper called *Pine and Palm*.

At the age of 23, he moved to Louisiana and began teaching school. Two years later, in 1866, he tried to open a common school for African Americans and Anglos in Jacksboro. His plans were ruined by an angry mob of Anglos who beat him severely. After that, he left Louisiana and moved to Galveston.

Supporting Former Slaves in Galveston In Galveston, Ruby reported for the *New Orleans Tribune* and taught school once again. He also got involved with the Freedmen's Bureau, a group that helped former slaves begin new lives. Ruby administered the bureau's schools and acted as a traveling agent, establishing chapters of the Union League in towns throughout Texas.

In 1867 Ruby quit the bureau but maintained his association with the Union League. This organization, which supported the rights of African Americans, supported the Republican Party. As president of the Union League, Ruby was able to persuade many African Americans to vote Republican, and he was rewarded politically for it. He was sent as a delegate to both the national Republican Convention in 1868 and the state Constitutional Convention of 1868–1869.

Elected to the Senate In 1868, Ruby was elected to the Texas Senate. His district was predominantly Anglo. As one of the most influential senators of the twelfth and thirteenth legislatures, Ruby played a crucial role in many judicial, militia, education, and state-affairs decisions of the time. His efforts helped incorporate major railroads and insurance companies, and he supported important geological and agricultural

surveys of the state. Ruby continued working with organized labor, and he helped create the first Labor Union of Colored Men in Galveston.

Falling Away from Politics In 1873 the Republicans began losing power in the legislature, and Ruby chose not to seek reelection. He returned to New Orleans and served as clerk of the surveyor for the Port of New Orleans.

Ruby was a strong supporter of the Exoduster movement of the late 1870s, which led more than 20,000 African Americans from the racially divided and often violent states of Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas to the Kansas frontier. He also continued to work on newspapers, and from 1877 to 1882 he edited the *New Orleans Observer*, a newspaper for African Americans.

Ruby's work in politics and civil rights was remarkable, especially for an African American at the time. Because of his education and diplomatic manner, he won over many Anglos who might have otherwise been enemies. George Ruby died of malaria on October 31, 1882, in New Orleans.

Review Questions

1. What incident caused Ruby to leave Louisiana?
2. What was the Exoduster movement, and why did Ruby support it?

Critical Thinking

3. **Analyzing Cause and Effect** Why is the work Ruby did during his life important for us today?
4. **Making Inferences** How do you think that Ruby's work with newspapers tied into his work with civil rights and labor organizations?