

Rayner, John Baptis ^[1]

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by William L. Andrews, 1994

1850–14 July 1918

John Baptis Rayner, educator and politician, was born into slavery in [Raleigh](#) ^[2], the son of [Kenneth Rayner](#) ^[3], a prominent plantation owner, and Mary Ricks, a slave. With the aid of his father, Rayner pursued his education after the [Civil War](#) ^[4] at St. Augustine's Episcopal School in Raleigh and later at both [Shaw University](#) ^[5] and [St. Augustine Collegiate Institute](#) ^[6]. Upon completing his studies, Rayner taught in rural schools near Raleigh. He was first elected to public office in [Tarboro](#) ^[7], where he served as deputy sheriff. In 1874 Rayner married Susan Clark Staten and they became the parents of two children, Mary and Ivan Edward. Following his religious conversion, Rayner worked for a time in North Carolina as a Baptist minister.

In 1881 Rayner moved his family to Robertson County, Tex., where he taught school, preached, and became associated with R. L. Smith's Farmers Improvement Society. After the death of his first wife he married Clarissa S. Clark, who bore him three additional children: Ahmed Arabi, Loris Melikoff, and Susie. By 1892 Rayner exchanged his original Republican sympathies for Populism and became a highly regarded stump speaker and organizer credited with bringing thousands of Afro-Americans into the Populist party. As a member of the party's state executive committee in 1895 and 1896, he wrote two articles for its organ, the *Southern Mercury*: "Political Imbroglia in Texas" (1, 5 Aug., 19 Sept. 1895) and "Modern Political Methods" (9 Apr., 26 June 1896). These articles represent Rayner's major published statements on Populism and Afro-American politics.

With the gradual absorption of many Texas Populists into the [Democratic party](#) ^[8] after the election of 1896, Rayner also became more active in Democratic politics. He identified himself with self-help and vocational education programs for black people in Texas. In 1902 and 1903 he helped to found the Texas Law and Order League, an organization designed to promote employment and greater conformity to law among Afro-Americans. By the fall of 1904 he had accepted a position as financial agent for the developing Conroe-Porter Industrial College of Conroe, Tex. Rayner remained in that position for two years. During this period he also began to work in the [Republican party](#) ^[9] for the first time since his days in North Carolina. In August 1911 Rayner was appointed by R. L. Smith to serve as financial agent and fund-raiser for the Farmers Improvement Society School at Ladonia, Tex. Retiring in 1913, Rayner spent the last five years of his life in Calvert, Tex., writing solicited letters to the editors of several newspapers in Texas and working to a limited extent for local Republican candidates. He died in Calvert.

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Authors:

Andrews, William L. ^[20]

Origin - location:

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Tarboro ^[22]

Wake County ^[23]

Raleigh ^[24]

Shaw University ^[25]

St. Augustine's College ^[26]

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[27]

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