



Image. Joe Lang Kershaw. (Source: Florida Memory).

Image. Joe Lang Kershaw being sworn into the Florida Legislature. (Source: Florida Memory).



Image. 1936 Hopkins Map of Brownsville showing Dr. A.J. Kershaw land ownership. (Source: Hopkins Map).

State Representative Joe Lang Kershaw, Sr.

Joe Lang Kershaw was elected to the Florida House of Representative in 1968 and served until 1982. He was the first Black legislator in the state of Florida since Reconstruction. He attended Florida A&M University in Tallahassee where he received a history degree in 1935 and his Master of Education degree in 1955. He was a career educator and he taught civics in Dade County public schools.

Representative Kershaw's civic involvement included serving on the Miami Economic Advisory Board, the Knights of Columbus, and the Holy Name Society. He was a lifelong member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. During his tenure as an elected representative, he served as chairman of the Elections Committee and introduced legislation that lead to the formation of the Florida Human Rights Commission.¹ In 1971, Kershaw maneuvered Florida Statute 241.477 through the legislature, which lead to the creation of the Black Archives at Florida A&M University.² He was known in the Florida House of Representatives as "Cane Pole," due to his ongoing battle to exclude cane pole fishing from requiring a license. The requirement was finally abolished in 1976, allowing people to fish in their own county with a cane pole, a common practice among poor African American people in Florida.³

Representative Kershaw was the son of Dr. A.J. Kershaw, a colleague of Dr. William B. Sawyer. Dr. Kershaw bought two acres of land from Dr. Sawyer in Brownsville in the 1930s, and his son Joe Lang Kershaw lived in a house on this land during his tenure in the Florida legislature and throughout his adult life.

DRAFT: MAY 16, 2025. These biographies are a draft and are subject to edits and corrections. Any errors or omissions are unintentional and are the sole responsibility of the author. Please contact Kenneth Kilpatrick of the Brownsville Civic Neighborhood Association (BCNA), or the author Megan McLaughlin of Plusurbia, with comments.

^{1 &}quot;Birth of Joe Lang Kershaw". Florida Historical Society. 2015-04-01. Retrieved 2020-01-22. Cited in Wikipedia contributors, "Joe Lang Kershaw," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Joe_Lang_Kershaw&oldid=1145694330 (accessed July 12, 2023).

^{2 &}quot;Meek Eaton Black Archives-Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University2020". famu.edu. Retrieved 2020-01-22. Cited in Wikipedia contributors, "Joe Lang Kershaw," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Joe_Lang_Kershaw&oldid=1145694330 (accessed July 12, 2023).

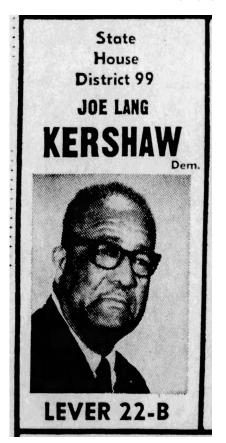
^{3 &}quot;Birth of Joe Lang Kershaw".



Miamian Makes History In Tallahassee

Joe Lang Kershaw (D., Miami) takes the oath of office in the Florida house chambers. The 57-year old high school teacher is the first Negro to serve in the Legislature since Reconstruction days. He

was elected in last Tuesday's balloting. Also ta the oath from Justice B. K. Roberts is Dade Rosentative Harold G. Featherstone (D., Miami).



Kershaw Wins Chance To Crash Racial Bar

By JIM SAVAGE Herald Staff Writes

Veteran high school teacher Joe Lang Kershaw Tuesday cleared the second—and probably the toughest—hurdle in his race toward becoming the first Negro in modern history to win a Florida legislative seat.

Kershaw, 56, maintained a slim lead over his Democratic opponent, Stephen H. Butter throughout the vote-counting, showing strength in a cross-section of predominately Negro and white precincts.

In the District 99 race, with 327 of 327 precincts reporting, Kershaw won with 55,556 votes to Butter's 47,-

Butter had edged Kershaw by 61 votes in their first primary contest, three weeks

House



Joe Lang Kershaw ... second hurdle

But the third man in that race, Dr. Franklin J. Evans of Coral Gables worked actively for Kershaw's election afterwards.

And Tuesday's results showed that Dr. Evans successfully handed Kershaw the majority of his 22,981 uncommitted votes.

In Dade's second legislative contest, North Miami councilman and former vicemayor George Baumgartner easily defeated Leo A. Furlong.

In District 107, with 327 of 327 precincts reporting, Baumgartner had 66,845 votes to Furlong's 42,075.

In his first county-wide c a m p a i g n, Baumgartner rolled up a strong three-to-two majority over Furlong, who was seeking a return to the House where he served a two-year term in 1963-64.

"I think my qualifications were the leading factor in my victory," Baumgartner said.

Image. 1968 newspaper article. (Source: The Miami News).

Image. 1968 political advertisement for District 99. (Source: The Miami Herald).

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