

John Lucas

John Gray Lucas was born in Marshall, Texas on March 11, 1864. As a young boy, he moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and attended public school. Upon finishing his public school education, Lucas entered the Branch Normal College of Arkansas Industrial University, which later became the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

In 1882, Lucas tried to make merchandising his profession, but after two years, he decided to take a different path. He moved to Boston, Massachusetts, in October 1884 and entered Boston University Law School. The only African-American in a class of fifty-two, he graduated with high honors in three years. After returning to Arkansas, he was admitted to the state bar. As a result, he was appointed assistant prosecuting attorney for Pine Bluff and Jefferson County. Later, he became the U.S. Commissioner for the U.S. Circuit Court, Eastern District of Arkansas. Lucas quickly gained prominence in the Republican party.

Lucas ran for a seat in the state legislature in the fall of 1890 and won. He staged a brilliant campaign against a formidable opponent and won, elevating the entire Republican ticket in the process. During his four-year term in the Arkansas House of Representatives, Lucas witnessed the rights of African-Americans slowly and legally taken away. He addressed the Arkansas House in February 1891 to oppose the Separate Coach Bill, which would require separate railway cars for blacks and whites. Lucas' speech was praised by whites and blacks alike, but despite his words, the bill passed. The Separate Coach Act was only the beginning. The Arkansas Legislature would continue to pass legislation blocking blacks from exercising the rights guaranteed to them by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.

By 1893, Lucas left Arkansas and migrated to Chicago. He became a successful attorney and appeared before the U.S. Supreme Court on four separate occasions. He was politically active in Chicago, becoming the first assistant recorder of deeds in Cook County, Illinois. He remained a prominent political figure in Cook County

politics despite switching parties in the 1930s. Like many African-Americans during the Great Depression, Lucas no longer agreed with the Republican Party's platform and became a Democrat. In 1934, he received his last appointment, assistant U.S. attorney in Cook County. He held this position until his death in 1944.