

George Henry White: The American Phoenix

"This is perhaps the Negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress, but let me say, Phoenix-like he will rise up some day and come again. These parting words are in behalf of an outraged, heart-broken, bruised and bleeding, but God-fearing people; faithful, industrious, loyal, rising people – full of potential force."

~George Henry White

Overview

In this lesson students examine the life and career of North Carolina native George Henry White, the last African American Congressman before the Jim Crow Era, as well as the reasons for the decline in African American representation in Congress during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through examination of Congressional data from the time period, viewing a documentary (optional), analyzing speech excerpts, class discussion, and more, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the political, cultural and racial realities of the Jim Crow Era. The lesson culminates with an assignment where students are tasked with creating a reelection campaign for White.

Grades

8-12

Materials

- "George Henry White: American Phoenix" 15-minute documentary; available at <http://www.georgehenrywhite.com/>
 - Teachers can also utilize online information to share with students (via lecture or having them read a handout) at <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/george-henry-white>
- Computers with internet access for student research (optional)
- "African American Members in Congress, 1869 - 1913", attached (p. 9-10)
- "The Negroes' Temporary Farewell: Jim Crow and the Exclusion of African Americans from Congress, 1887–1929", attached (p. 11-12)
- "American Phoenix Viewing Guide", attached (p. 13)
- "George Henry White Quotes", attached (p. 14 - 15)
- "You're a Campaign Manager: George White's Congressional Campaign", attached (p. 16-17)
- "George Henry White: A brief biographical sketch", attached (optional) (p. 18-20)
- OPTIONAL: For a broader look at the African American Representatives in Congress during Reconstruction, see the Carolina K-12's lesson at
 - <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2012/10/AfricanAmericansUSCongressReconstruction.pdf>
 - Accompanying PPT: <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2012/10/AfAmUSCongressReconstructionPPT-1.pdf>

Essential Questions

- What took place politically, legally and culturally during the Jim Crow Era and how did it affect African American representation in Congress?
- In what ways did African Americans try to empower themselves during the Jim Crow Era despite the adversity they faced?
- Who was George Henry White and in what ways did he strive to improve the lives of African Americans?
- Why is it important to learn about and remember the work and accomplishments of George Henry White?

Duration

1 class period for lesson; additional class and/or homework time will be needed for completing and presenting the final project

Student Preparation

- Students should be familiar with the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the political gains made by African Americans (13th, 14th, 15th Amendments; Radical Reconstruction; etc.) during this period, before completing this lesson. Students should also have a basic understanding of the Republican and Democratic parties of the 1800s.
- While topics such as slavery, Reconstruction, segregation, racism, and the Jim Crow Era can be sensitive topics to discuss with students, it is important for students to explore such “hard history” to ensure they understand the implications of our past, the impact on our present, and are empowered to address the challenges of the future. In order to study such topics effectively and safely, teachers must have established a safe classroom community with clear expectations of respect, open-mindedness, and civil conversation. See [Carolina K-12’s “Activities” section of the Database of K-12 Resources](#) for ways to ensure a classroom environment conducive to the effective exploration of sensitive and controversial issues. Teachers should also consult Carolina K-12’s [“Tips for Tackling Sensitive History & Controversial Current Events in the Classroom.”](#)

Procedure

Warm Up: African-Americans in Congress

1. As a warm up, project or distribute the attached “African Americans in Congress, 1869 - 2013” handout. Ask students to review the table and to quietly note any trends or patterns that may emerge. Once students have had time to review the chart, discuss the following questions as a class:
 - What first strikes you about this information? Is there anything that you find surprising or that you have questions about? Explain.
 - There were no African American representatives in Congress before 1869. Why do you think this was the case?
 - During what periods have the most African American representatives been in Congress? Why do you think this is the case?
 - During what periods of history have there been no African American representatives? Again, why might this be the case?
 - Discuss with students how at several points, there is only one African American present in either the House and/or the Senate. Think about the pressure that would potentially create on this person, and also the strength, courage and resilience such Representatives must have inhabited in order to serve in this position.
 - Why do you think that from 1901 – 1929 there were no African American representatives in Congress?
 - What can this chart teach us about life for African Americans after the Civil War? What can it teach us about the experience of African Americans throughout history?

Fusion Politics, Jim Crow & Congress

2. Explain to students that they will now be reviewing a short reading about the reasons for the decline of African American representation in Congress after Reconstruction. Remind students that Reconstruction was a period after the Civil War when slavery was abolished (13th Amendment) and African Americans gained many political rights, including equal protection under the law (14th Amendment) and the right to vote (15th Amendment).
3. Divide students into pairs and ask them to read the attached, “The Negroes’ Temporary Farwell: Jim Crow and the Exclusion of African Americans from Congress, 1887-1929” from the House of Representatives’

Archives. Provide students with 10 -15 minutes to complete the reading and answer the questions with their partner. After the allotted time, discuss the attached questions as a class:

- Why did African American representation in Congress disappear after 1901?
- What obstacles did African American representatives face in Congress after 1887? Why do you think these obstacles arose after 1887?
- What was Jim Crow and how did it affect African American representation in Congress? What are some examples of Jim Crow laws?
- If you were one of the last African American representatives in Congress, what issues would you advocate for? What laws would you like to see changed? Why?

4. Provide students with some specific context for North Carolina politics in the 1890s:

In the 1890s, there were three major political parties: the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the People's Party (or Populist Party).

- The **Republican Party** originally emerged as the anti-slavery party in the 1850s, but it was not officially organized in NC until 1867. Their platform consisted of free enterprise, racial toleration, and political equality for African Americans.
- The **Democratic Party** originally supported slave holding. They developed into a coalition of wealthy, working class, and rural white members. This coalition controlled NC state and local governments from 1876 – 1894, but the coalition weakened after the 1880s.
- **The People's Party (or Populist Party)** was founded by working class and rural whites who left the Democratic Party in the 1880s and 1890s.

As an economic depression in the late 1800s deepened, white Populists joined forces with Black Republicans forming the "Fusion Coalition" (1894-1896). By "fusing" their voters, they hoped to defeat the Democrats and regain control of local and statewide politics. Fusionists championed local self-government, free public education, and electoral reforms that would give black men the same voting rights as whites. "Fusion" was successful and the party won every NC statewide office in the 1894 and 1896 elections. Daniel Russell was elected to serve as the first Republican Governor of North Carolina since Reconstruction. Russell enacted changes to Wilmington and New Bern city charters in order to reverse laws established by Democrats to assure their control of those cities. "Fusionists" allowed more African-American participation in government, although only a handful of positions were held by African Americans. Despite the Fusion Coalition's initial success, their victories were short lived. The Wilmington Race Riot (1898) – a violent overthrow of Wilmington's Fusion government by Democrats -- and sweeping electoral successes for Democrats across the state in 1898 and 1900, put an end to Fusion politics and ushered in the era of Jim Crow to North Carolina.

For more in-depth look at Fusion politics and the Wilmington Race Riot, see the Carolina K-12's lesson [The Wilmington Coup of 1898](#).

George Henry White: An American Phoenix

5. Inform students that they are going to be learning about North Carolina native George Henry White, who is considered to be the last African American Congressman before the Jim Crow Era. A successful attorney, North Carolina native George White was among the most notable black Republican political leaders of his era. He was the last African American elected to Congress during the 19th century, and the first to serve in the 20th century. One of four black congressmen elected from North Carolina's Second District, called the "Black Second" for its black-majority population, during and after Reconstruction, White served two terms (1897–1901). He was the only black member of the U.S. House during his two terms, and the nation's last black congressman until 1929.

- **Teacher note:** If your students are unfamiliar with the term, “phoenix”, explain to them that a phoenix is a fiery bird from Greek mythology that would burn and then be reborn from the ashes of the previous phoenix.
6. Play the 15-minute documentary available at <https://www.georgehenrywhite.com>. Viewing options:
- a. You may choose to have the class watch the video with no pauses and have students work on the attached Viewer’s Guide while watching. While the video is short, it is very information heavy, so note that students may not be as engaged with the content without teacher involvement.
 - b. *Suggested Viewing:* You may choose to pause the video at the times outlined below and ask the class to discuss the questions listed. Students may complete the questions below in addition to or instead of the questions on the Viewer’s Guide.
 - 1) **Pause at 2:00** (When the narrator says, “With the door to political power closed...”):
 - What did GHW’s fight for while he was in the House of Representatives?
 - Why do you think GHW was the only African American in Congress? How do you think he felt?
 - 2) **Pause at 5:50** (When the narrator says, “In 1894, his growing family moved to Tarboro...”):
 - How do you think GHW’s childhood influenced his adult life?
 - How do you think his time at Howard University influenced his political career?
 - What hardships did GHW face throughout his life? How do you think he was able to overcome those hardships?
 - What did GHW accomplish before becoming a US Congressman?
 - 3) **Pause at 9:30** (When the narrator says, “He decided to start over in the North...”):
 - Why do you think GHW’s lynching bill died in committee?
 - Why do you think that African Americans were losing political power in the late 1800s?
 - Why did GHW leave North Carolina?
 - 4) **At the conclusion of the documentary:**
 - How did GHW try to economically empower African Americans?
 - What role did education play in GHW’s life?
 - Why do you think GHW is not more widely known?
 - Why is the title of the documentary, “American Phoenix”? Do you think this title accurately represents GHW? What title would you give the documentary?
7. At the conclusion of the documentary, discuss the questions from the handout:
- What issues did George Henry White advocate for or oppose while in the US Congress?
 - *Lynching, hate crimes, voting rights, civil rights, Wilmington Coup of 1898*
 - What hardships did White face throughout his life?
 - *Lost two of his wives, grew up in poverty, faced racism, political disempowerment*
 - What role did education play in White’s life?
 - *An important one. He always found the time to educate himself, he was a teacher, and he helped construct schools in Whitesboro.*
 - What role do you think did Fusion politics played in White’s getting elected to Congress?
 - *Fusion politics played a large role in getting White elected to Congress. He was considered one of the leaders of the Fusion movement and his election in 1896 coincided with the peak of Fusion power in North Carolina.*
 - What are lynchings? Why do you think White’s anti-lynching bill failed in Congress?
 - *A form of mob violence, which included extrajudicial executions by hanging, used to intimidate people who opposed the ruling order in various states. Answers will vary.*
 - Why did White leave North Carolina?
 - *Denial of the right of African Americans to vote via literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and poll taxes.*

- How did White try to economically empower African Americans?
 - *Created the town of Whitesboro, founded the People's Savings Bank in Philadelphia, PA and founded the first school in Whitesboro.*
- Why is the title of the documentary, “American Phoenix”? What title would you give the documentary?

George Henry White’s Quotes

8. Explain to students in order to gain a greater understanding of George Henry White, they will now be reading quotes from various speeches White gave while in Congress. Many of these quotes are from his farewell address to Congress, which was quoted by President Obama at the end of the documentary.
 9. Divide students into groups of 3 – 6 and distribute a quote strip to each student in the group. Ask students to take out a blank sheet of paper and write down the following questions:
 - What issue or issues does your quote address?
 - What does your quote tell you about George Henry White’s beliefs?
 - What words would you use to describe George Henry White based upon your quote?
 - Do you agree with George Henry White’s message in this quote? Why or why not?
 10. Inform students that they have 5 – 10 minutes to silently read their quote and answer the questions. After time is up, they will spend 10 minutes sharing their quote and their answers with their group. Instruct the groups to choose the quote that they think represents what George Henry White fought for.
- **Teacher Note:** There are 6 quotes provided, but teachers can vary the size of the groups by omitting certain quotes or using some more than once.
11. After the allotted time, review the quotations as a class and discuss the following questions:
 - What do these quotes tell you about what kind of person George Henry White was?
 - How do you think George Henry White felt about the disenfranchisement and political disempowerment of African Americans during the Jim Crow Era?
 - Besides empowering African Americans politically with the vote, what other ways did George Henry White try to advocate for African American empowerment?
 - Which quote do you think best represents what George Henry White stood for and why?
 - What is most important to for us to remember about George Henry White and why? If you could teach one person or group of people about White, who would you teach and why?

Design George Henry White’s Campaign

12. Explain to students that George Henry White declined to run for reelection in Congress after 1901 and he never returned to political office on the national stage. However, he did run for the Republican nomination for Congress in a special election in 1912 as a representative from Philadelphia. For this assignment, they’re going to run his reelection campaign. Using the information they’ve learned from the documentary, the quotes, and various other sources (detailed information is available at <https://www.georgehenrywhite.com/>), they’re going to create a campaign slogan, write a short campaign speech, and create a campaign poster that urges people to vote for George Henry White.
 13. Instruct students to remain in their groups and provide each group with the attached, “You’re a Campaign Manager” handout. Review the handout, answer any questions, and inform students of the due date, before allowing groups to work independently.
- **Teacher notes:**
- If students do not have access to computers to do additional research using the links listed on the handout, provide each group with one or two copies of the attached, “George Henry White Biography”. This reading provides enough background information to complete the assignment.

- Teachers can also provide students with examples of campaign posters by accessing the following sites:
 - <http://www.thedailybeast.com/galleries/2012/05/25/11-best-u-s-presidential-campaign-posters-of-all-time.html>
 - <http://www.loc.gov/publish/general/presidentialcampaignposters.html>

14. On the day that the project is due, instruct students to hang their posters around the room at the start of class. Number each poster then provide time for students to circulate among the posters in a “gallery walk.” They should carry paper and pencil and write down “What they liked and learned” for each poster (noting its number) or for a pre-determined number of posters (i.e., instruct students to review 5 posters of their choosing.) Once students are finished discuss:

- Which poster (other than your own) would make you want to vote for White and why?

15. After the gallery walk, instruct each group’s Candidate to stand in the front of the room to deliver the campaign speech. Before delivering the speeches, remind students to be respectful to each speaker by paying attention and showing their appreciation for the speaker by clapping at the conclusion of each speech. At the end of each speech, participate in a short discussion:

- What did you learn about White from this speech?
- What did he share that would compel you to vote for him?
- What one question would you like to ask the Candidate?

Teachers should also use the post-discussion to clarify any misconceptions if present and further point out any important facts regarding White students should know.

16. Once all the speakers have presented, allow the class to vote on their favorite poster and their favorite speech. (Teachers may want to provide the winning groups with a small prize such as bonus points or homework passes.)

17. Discuss the following questions in conclusion:

- Why do you think many Southern states worked to disenfranchise African Americans after Reconstruction?
- Why do you think George Henry White never ran for Congress again after 1901?
- What do you most admire about George Henry White? What can we learn from his life?
- Of George Henry White’s methods of empowering African Americans (educational, economic, political, etc.), which was the most effective and why?
- Why is it important to learn about and remember the work and accomplishments of George Henry White?
- If you had to summarize the life of George Henry White using one word or phrase, what word(s) would you use?

Resources

- Official Website of George Henry White
 - <http://www.georgehenrywhite.com/>
- DocSouth, George Henry White’s Congressional Farewell
 - <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/whitegh/whitegh.html>
- History, Art & Archives of the United States House of Representatives, “Black Americans in Congress”
 - <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Black-Americans-in-Congress/>
- ANCHOR, “George White speaks out on lynchings”
 - <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/george-white-speaks-out>

African Americans in Congress, 1869 - 2013

Years	Total Number of AA Members of Congress	AA Members of House	AA Members of Senate
1869 – 1871	3	2	1
1871 - 1873	5	5	0
1873 - 1875	7	7	0
1875 – 1877	8	7	1
1877 – 1879	4	3	1
1879 – 1881	1	0	1
1881 - 1883	2	2	0
1883 – 1885	2	2	0
1885 – 1887	2	2	0
1887 – 1889	0	0	0
1889 – 1891	3	3	0
1891 – 1893	1	1	0
1893 – 1895	1	1	0
1895 – 1897	1	1	0
1897 – 1899	1	1	0
1899 – 1901	1	1	0
1901 – 1903	1	0	0
1903 – 1905	0	0	0
1905 – 1907	0	0	0
1907 – 1909	0	0	0
1909 -1911	0	0	0
1911 - 1913	0	0	0
1913 – 1915	0	0	0
1915 – 1917	0	0	0
1917 – 1919	0	0	0
1919 – 1921	0	0	0
1921 – 1923	0	0	0
1923 – 1925	0	0	0
1925 – 1927	0	0	0
1927 – 1929	0	0	0
1929 – 1931	1	1	0
1931 – 1933	1	1	0
1933 – 1935	1	1	0
1935 – 1937	1	1	0
1937 – 1939	1	1	0
1939 – 1941	1	1	0
1941 – 1943	1	1	0
1943 – 1945	1	1	0
1945 – 1947	2	2	0

Years	Total Number of AA Members of Congress	AA Members of House	AA Members of Senate
1947 – 1949	2	2	0
1949 – 1951	2	2	0
1951 – 1953	2	2	0
1953 – 1955	2	2	0
1955 – 1957	3	3	0
1957 – 1959	4	4	0
1959 – 1961	4	4	0
1961 – 1963	4	4	0
1963 – 1965	5	5	0
1965 – 1967	6	6	0
1967 – 1969	6	5	1
1969 – 1971	11	10	1
1971 -1973	14	13	1
1973 – 1975	17	16	1
1975 – 1977	18	17	1
1977 – 1979	18	17	1
1979 – 1981	17	17	0
1981 – 1983	19	19	0
1983 – 1985	21	21	0
1985 – 1987	21	21	0
1987 – 1989	23	23	0
1989 – 1991	24	24	0
1991 – 1993	27	27	1
1993 – 1995	40	39	1
1995 – 1997	41	40	1
1997 – 1999	40	39	1
1999 – 2001	39	39	0
2001 – 2003	39	39	0
2003 – 2005	39	39	0
2005 – 2007	43	42	1
2007 – 2009	42	42	1
2009 – 2011	42	41	1
2011 – 2013	44	44	0
2013 - 2015	45	43	2

Sources: <https://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/RL30378.pdf>; <https://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/R42964.pdf>

Name _____

Directions: Review the following reading and answer the attached questions. As you're reading, underline points that you think are important, circle any words that you do not recognize and write comments in the margins as you find yourself surprised or curious about what you read.

The Negroes' Temporary Farewell: Jim Crow and the Exclusion of African Americans from Congress, 1887–1929

On December 5, 1887, for the first time in almost two decades, Congress met without an African-American member. "All the men who stood up in awkward squads to be sworn in on Monday had white faces," noted a correspondent for the Philadelphia Record of the Members who took the oath of office on the House Floor. "The negro is not only out of Congress, he is practically out of politics." Though three black men served in the next Congress (51st, 1889–1891), the number of African Americans serving on Capitol Hill declined significantly as the congressional focus on racial equality faded. Only five African Americans were elected to the House in the next decade: Henry Cheatham and **George White of North Carolina**, Thomas Miller and George Murray of South Carolina, and John M. Langston of Virginia. But despite their isolation, these men wanted to represent the interests of all African Americans. Like the African American representatives before them, they confronted violent and contested elections, difficulty receiving desirable committee assignments, and an inability to pass laws they supported. Moreover, these black Members faced further obstacles in the form of legalized segregation and disfranchisement (being denied the right to vote), general disinterest in progressive racial legislation, and the increasing power of southern conservatives in Congress.

In the decade after the 1876 presidential election, the Republican-dominated Reconstruction governments, which had backed black political participation in the South, slowly fell apart, leaving the rights of black voters vulnerable to Democratic state governments controlled by former Confederates and their sympathizers. The electoral crisis of 1876 also revealed cracks within the Republican Party, as many party leaders focused on economic issues rather than on the racial equality agenda previously pushed by the Republicans. By the 1890s, most Black Americans had either been banned from or abandoned voting and running for office in frustration. Advocacy for blacks in Congress became substantially more difficult. **After Representative White's departure from the House in March 1901, no African American served in the U.S. Congress for nearly three decades.** The length of this departure from national politics shows the success of the system of racial segregation imposed upon blacks by law and custom, known widely as "Jim Crow."

Jim Crow

During this era African Americans experienced unique suffering and deprivation. Beginning in the last quarter of the 19th century, blacks—the vast majority of whom still lived in the South—endured a system of racial segregation that restricted their political, economic, and social status. Distinguished historian of the South C. Vann Woodward explains that the removal of key "restraints" unleashed widespread racist social policies. Lack of interest in fostering an equal society in the South, the failure of southern politicians to stop political racism, and the corresponding surrender of the southern ruling class to rising white supremacists, each played a part in creating an unjust system of racism and segregation in American society. This became known as the Jim Crow Era.

Jim Crow, a system of segregation enforced by legal and extralegal (outside of the law) means, evolved over several decades. Jim Crow was a popular character in southern minstrel shows—in which white performers in blackface portrayed negative stereotypes of African Americans. How the term Jim Crow came to be associated with segregation is not clear, but it was eventually used to describe both the formal and the informal types of segregation in the South.

Beginning with Tennessee in 1870, every southern state adopted laws against interracial marriage. By the 1880s, most public places and many private businesses had “Whites Only” and “Colored Only” facilities. These included schools, seating areas, drinking fountains, work spaces, government buildings, train stations, hospitals, restaurants, hotels, theaters, barbershops, laundries, and public restrooms.

Virtually all the political advances won by freedmen during Reconstruction were rolled back and disappeared during the years after 1890. In the South, the races were separated even more systematically and rigidly than during slavery.

1. Why did African American representation in Congress disappear after 1901?
2. What obstacles did African American representatives face in Congress after 1887? Why do you think these obstacles arose after 1887?
3. What was Jim Crow and how did it affect African American representation in Congress? What are some examples of Jim Crow laws?
4. If you were one of the last African American representatives in Congress, what issues would you advocate for? What laws would you like to see changed? Why?

Background: A successful attorney, George White was among the most notable black Republican political leaders of his era. He was the last African American elected to Congress during the 19th century, and the first to serve in the 20th century. One of four black congressmen elected from North Carolina's Second District, called the "Black Second" for its black-majority population, during and after Reconstruction, White served two terms (1897–1901). He was the only black member of the U.S. House during his two terms, and the nation's last black congressman until 1929.

Directions: Answer the following questions while watching the documentary, "George Henry White: American Phoenix".

1. What issues did George Henry White advocate for or oppose while in the US Congress?
2. What hardships did White face throughout his life?
3. What role did education play in White's life?
4. What are lynchings? Why do you think White's anti-lynching bill failed in Congress?
5. Why did White leave North Carolina?
6. How did White try to economically empower African Americans?
7. Why is the title of the documentary, "American Phoenix?" What alternate title would you give the documentary?

George Henry White Quotes

Quote #1

It is an undisputed fact that the negro vote in the State of Alabama, as well as most of the other Southern States, have been effectively suppressed, either one way or the other--in some instances by constitutional amendment and State legislation, in others by cold-blooded fraud and intimidation, but whatever the method pursued, it is not denied, but frankly admitted in the speeches in this House, that the black vote has been eliminated to a large extent.

Quote #2

"If we are unworthy of suffrage, if it is necessary to maintain white supremacy, then you ought to have the benefit only of those who are allowed to vote, and the poor men, whether they be black or white, who are disfranchised ought not go into representation of the district of the state."

Quote #3

This Mr. Chairman, is perhaps the negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress; but let me say, Phoenix-like he will rise up some day and come again. These parting words are in behalf of an outraged, heart-broken, bruised, and bleeding, but God-fearing people, faithful, industrious, loyal people – rising people, full of potential force.

Quote #4

I read in a Democratic paper a few days ago, the Washington Times, an extract taken from a South Carolina paper, which was intended to exhibit the eagerness with which the negro is grasping every opportunity for educating himself. The clipping showed that the money for each white child in the State ranged from three to five times as much per capita as was given to each colored child. This is helping us some, but not to the extent that one would infer from the gentleman's speech.

Quote #5

We [African Americans] are operating successfully several banks, commercial enterprises among our people in the Southland [...]. We have 32,000 teachers in the schools of the country; we have built, with the aid of our friends, about 20,000 churches, and support 7 colleges, 17 academies, 50 high schools, 5 law schools, 5 medical schools, and 25 theological seminaries. We have over 600,000 acres of land in the South alone. The cotton produced, mainly by black labor, has increased from 4,669,770 bales in 1860 to 11,235,000 in 1899. All this we have done under the most adverse circumstances. We have done it in the face of lynching, burning at the stake, with the humiliation of "Jim Crow" cars, the disfranchisement of our male citizens, slander and degradation of our women, with the factories closed against us, no negro permitted to be conductor on the railway cars, whether run through the streets of our cities or across the prairies of our great country, no negro permitted to run as engineer on a locomotive, most of the mines closed against us. [...] Some day we hope to have them employed in our own stores. With all these odds against us, we are forging our way ahead, slowly, perhaps, but surely. You may tie us and then taunt us for a lack of bravery, but one day we will break the bonds. You may use our labor for two and a half centuries and then taunt us for our poverty, but let me remind you we will not always remain poor. You may withhold even the knowledge of how to read God's word and learn the way from earth to glory and then taunt us for our ignorance, but we would remind you that there is plenty of room at the top, and we are climbing.

Quote #6

While I deprecate as much as any man can the fiend who commits an outrage upon any woman, and do not hesitate to say that he should be speedily tried and punished by the courts, yet I place but little credence in the statement of a mob hunting for an excuse for its crimes when the statement is made that the victim confessed with a rope perhaps around his neck. No court of justice anywhere in this broad land of ours would allow testimony under duress of this kind to be introduced against a defendant. [...] A trial by jury is guaranteed to everyone by the Constitution of the United States, and no one should be deprived of this guaranty, however grave the charge preferred against him.

Name _____

You're a Campaign Manager: George Henry White's Reelection Campaign

Directions: Your group is to imagine that the year is 1912 and that George Henry White has decided to run for the Republican nomination for Congress in a special election in 1912 as a representative from Philadelphia. He has hired your group to run his reelection campaign. Using the information provided in class and information you will obtain through additional research, it is your group's job to convince voters to cast their ballots for George White in the upcoming election. You will do this by creating a campaign slogan, a campaign poster, and a short campaign kickoff speech that outlines George Henry White's views on various issues. While you are encouraged to be creative, you must also be historically accurate in the information shared and the way you share it. (For example, don't mention or utilize modern inventions that were not present in 1912 in your work.)



Steps for Completion:

- I. **ROLES:** Each person should assume a role below. While one group member will take the lead on each of the following campaign components, all group members should participate in each step.
 - **Chief of Staff:** Moderates group discussion, keeps everyone on task, makes sure that everyone has an opportunity to participate and will present the campaign kickoff speech to the class.
 - **Campaign Speechwriter:** The speechwriter takes notes during the group's discussion and leads the in brainstorming, finalizing and practicing a short 3-minute campaign kickoff speech.
 - **Artistic Director:** The artistic director is responsible for leading the group in brainstorming and creating a campaign slogan and poster.

- II. **DISCUSSION & SLOGAN:** Discuss what you think voters should know about White before beginning your research. The group should also brainstorm a campaign slogan for the campaign. Use the following questions to start the discussion:
 - What issues does White support?
 - What issues does White oppose?
 - What parts of White's life might be attractive to voters?
 - Philadelphia is a diverse city, made up of African American immigrants from the South and immigrants from Europe. How might White's leadership of the Fusion coalition in North Carolina persuade a diverse group of voters to vote for him?
 - What are White's accomplishments?
 - What difficulties does White's campaign face?
 - How would you capture George White's life in one sentence?

- III. **RESEARCH:** All group members should begin by conducting additional research on George Henry White. Using documents provided by your teacher and/or the following websites, each person should find three interesting facts or pieces of information about George White that you think would help his campaign. Website recommendations include:
 - <http://history.house.gov/People/Detail?id=23657>
 - <http://www.georgehenrywhite.com/>

IV. SPEECH & POSTER: As your research comes to a close, the Candidate will instruct each member to share the three interesting facts they found while researching.

Using information from your readings, the documentary and any additional sources, begin working on your speeches and posters.

Final speeches should be approximately 3 minutes and should include:

- An introduction, including an “attention grabber” at the very beginning
- A short biographical sketch
- Three issues you support or oppose and will fight for or against if elected to Congress
- A conclusion that includes your campaign slogan and explains why people should vote for you.
- The speech must be historically accurate.
- In general, the Candidate should attempt to present the speech in an engaging, entertaining and inspirational way (i.e., use eye contact when possible, vary vocal tone, etc.)

The posters should:

- Be colorful and eye catching.
- Illustrate one or two reasons to vote for George White.
- Include the campaign slogan and art work
- Be historically accurate

Questions/Notes:

George Henry White: A brief biographical sketch

by Benjamin R. Justesen

Prof. Geo. H. White, the last, but not least, of the speakers, was introduced amid loud applause. His very appearance seemed to beam for the rhetorical magnitude and we were all highly edified ... from the very eloquent and telling speech which he favored us with; and I know that if any of our citizens had taken to themselves the idea of immigration, they have abandoned it after hearing his telling speech.

He resides in the City of Newbern, and since he has taken his departure from Beaufort I learn that he passed a first-class examination, and has been licensed by our Supreme Court to practice law in the courts of our State. We wish him every imaginable success attending those of his profession.

—S. A. Blount, *Wilmington (N.C.) Post*, 19 January 1879

George Henry White's first public speech came at an Emancipation Day gathering in the small coastal town of Beaufort, N.C., where he shared the day's honors with other up-and-coming African American politicians. At 26, White was still working as a teacher and school principal in the nearby city of New Bern, his home since finishing normal school at Howard University two years earlier. His determination to become a lawyer had led him to New Bern, at the invitation of a distinguished retired Republican judge and former Confederate officer, William John Clarke, under whose direction White had lately been reading the law.

White was still comparatively unknown outside New Bern, yet word of his oratorical skills would quickly spread through North Carolina. His was a compelling story. The child of a free, mixed-race turpentine farmer in Columbus County, George White was born in Rosindale, Bladen County, on December 18, 1852. No details are available regarding his birth mother, who may have been a slave and appears to have died shortly after her son's birth. In 1857, his father, Wiley Franklin White, married Mary Anna Spaulding, the 17-year-old daughter of a prominent free farmer of mixed race; she raised the youth as her own child, and in later years, George White always named her as his mother.

Although his early education was limited by circumstance, George White's determination and brilliance propelled him after the Civil War into a private normal school before entering Howard University in 1874. He later attributed much of his success to the intervention of David P. Allen, an African American teacher who founded the respected Whitin Normal School in nearby Lumberton, recruiting White as one of his first students.

In 1879, George White's astounding political career had yet to begin. Yet even white observers of the period would be quick to praise his legal skills and oratorical prowess, honed perhaps by years of listening to such African American figures as Frederick Douglass, a trustee at Howard during White's three-year tenure there, and Robert Brown Elliott, whose Congressional remarks on the civil rights bill in 1874 were so often hailed.

Although White's transcript at Howard shows just one specific course in public speaking or declamation, the handful of other courses called "Rhetoricals" almost certainly included extended training in oratory. He continued to exhibit a strong interest in the law, which he read on his own at Howard. By the time White obtained his normal certificate from Howard in 1877, however, the school's fledgling law department had closed temporarily, with no immediate promise of reopening.

Rather than accept a transitional job as a messenger in a federal department, White chose instead to accept a teaching post in New Bern, a small, predominantly black city still controlled by Republicans after the end of Reconstruction. Here he came under the tutelage of Clarke, a former Superior Court judge now practicing law with his son. The Clarkes' commitment to African American education and social progress underscored White's own dedication to public service and the advancement of his race.

When White passed the state's rigorous bar examination, personally administered in those days by the members of North Carolina's Supreme Court, he was the state's only black candidate in a class of 32. He then established a small practice in New Bern, becoming one of a half-dozen African American attorneys in the state.

While developing his law practice and running for his first public offices, White continued to work until 1883 as a schoolteacher and principal, serving for two years as the appointed principal of a new state-run normal training school for African American schoolteachers at New Bern. His detailed reports to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for those years are among the longest documents he is known to have written.

By the fall of 1880, White had also emerged as a formidable political candidate, winning election on the Republican ticket as a member of the N. C. House from Craven County. He later served one term as a Republican in the state Senate (elected 1884) from Craven County, before serving two terms (1887-1894) as the nation's only elected black prosecutor, representing the state's so-called "black Second" district.

White quickly established a solid reputation for skillful courtroom techniques and became a well-known figure in state Republican politics. After being touted in 1892 as a possible Republican candidate for state attorney general, White moved from New Bern to Tarboro, N.C., in 1894. Two years later, he won his first term in the U.S. Congress from the Second Congressional District, after defeating his brother-in-law, former Congressman Henry Plummer Cheatham, for the party nomination in 1896.

Reelected to Congress in a three-way race in 1898, White was the nation's only African American Congressman for four years, gaining national recognition as a vocal defender of civil rights and political equality for his race, and serving as a state delegate to two national Republican conventions, in 1896 and 1900.

The gradual disfranchisement of black voters by Southern states and the rising tide of "white supremacy" across the South brought an end to White's political career in North Carolina. He was the last African American member of Congress to serve until 1929, and the last to be elected from North Carolina until the 1990s.

After declining to run for Congress again in 1900, White severed ties with his native state, moving his family to Washington, D.C., and later to Philadelphia, where he practiced law. But he continued to fight for civil rights on a national level, serving as an officer in the short-lived National Afro-American Council and as an early leader in its successor, the NAACP, as well as in other organizations, including the Constitution League and the National Negro Bankers' Association.

George White devoted the last two decades of his life primarily to two significant business activities, as president of Philadelphia's first black-owned commercial savings bank and as the founder of a land development company in southern New Jersey. The small town of Whitesboro, N.J., an experimental industrial colony for black settlers in Cape May County, still stands. He served as an active honorary trustee of Howard University for 20 years, as well as a trustee of Biddle University in Charlotte, N.C., both of which awarded him honorary degrees.

White continued to speak out on social and political issues, and never lost interest in politics. For years he campaigned vigorously for Republican candidates for local and state office in Philadelphia. In 1912, he briefly attempted a comeback to Congress in an unsuccessful quest for the Republican nomination in a special election in Philadelphia's First District. In 1916, he was selected as Pennsylvania's first black alternate state delegate to the national Republican convention in Chicago. In 1917, a year before his death, he was appointed as an assistant city solicitor in Philadelphia. He died at his home there on December 28, 1918.

White was married four times and widowed three times. His first three wives, all buried in New Bern, N.C., were Fannie B. Randolph White (1859-1880, m. 1879); Nancy J. Scott White (1862-1882, m. 1882); and Cora Lena Cherry White (1864-1905, m. 1887). His fourth wife, Ellen Avant McDonald White (b. 1877, m. 1915), moved after White's death to Atlantic City, N.J., and remarried; she is believed to have died in the 1960s.

George White is buried in Eden Cemetery in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, outside Philadelphia, beside the graves of two of his four children: daughter Mary Adelyne ("Mamie") White (1887-1974) and son George H. White, Jr. (1893-1927). Two other daughters are buried elsewhere: Beatrice Odessa White (1891-1892), buried in New Bern, N.C., and Della Mae White Garrett (1880-1916), buried in Washington, D.C. Della's daughter Fannie, born in Asheville, N.C., about 1905, was George White's only known grandchild; no other details are available on her life and death.

White's father, Wiley F. White (1820-1893), is also buried in New Bern. His stepmother, Mary Anna Spaulding White, died in Washington, D.C., in 1912. White's siblings included one older half-brother, John W. White of Columbus County (1846-1920), and at least one younger half-sister, Flora White, who was born in Columbus County in about 1858 and who had moved with her husband to Georgia by the 1890s.

Benjamin R. Justesen is the author of George Henry White: An Even Chance in the Race of Life (LSU Press, 2001). This biographical sketch, which he originally prepared for use in his second book—In His Own Words: The Writings, Speeches, and Letters of George Henry White (iUniverse.com, 2004)—has been expanded for use in this curriculum.