



# George Henry White: An Even Chance in the Race of Life (Southern Biography Series)

*Benjamin R. Justesen*

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Although he was one of the most important African American political leaders during the last decade of the nineteenth century, George Henry White has been one of the least remembered. A North Carolina representative from 1897 to 1901, White was the last man of his race to serve in the Congress during the post-Reconstruction period, and his departure left a void that would go unfilled for nearly thirty years. At once the most acclaimed and reviled symbol of the freed slaves whose cause he heralded, White remains today largely a footnote to history. In this exhaustively researched biography, Benjamin R. Justesen rescues from obscurity the fascinating story of this compelling figure's life and accomplishments.

The mixed-race son of a free turpentine farmer, White became a teacher, lawyer, and prosecutor in rural North Carolina. From these modest beginnings he rose in 1896 to become the only black member of the House of Representatives and perhaps the most nationally visible African American politician of his time. White was outspoken in his challenge to racial injustice, but, as Justesen shows, he was no militant racial extremist as antagonistic white democrats charged. His plea was always for simple justice in a nation whose democratic principles he passionately loved. A conservative by philosophy, he was a dedicated Republican to the end. After he retired from Congress, he remained active in the fight against racial discrimination, working with national leaders of both races, from Booker T. Washington to the founders of the NAACP.

Through judicious use of public documents, White's speeches, newspapers, letters, and secondary sources, Justesen creates an authoritative and balanced portrait of this complex man and proves him to be a much more effective leader than previously believed.

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