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The Progressive Era and Congressman George H. White’s Farewell Address to Congress

This essay is about a political speech, which was delivered by Congressman George H. White in the time period of the progressive era (1890-1920) addressing to the U.S. House of Representatives. He gave this speech on January 29, 1901. Although White was the most important African American leader in the last decade of nineteenth century, White has been one of the least remembered. White was a two-term Republican congressman from North Carolina’s Second Congressional district (known as the Black Second because of its large African American majority). During White’s years in the fifty-fifty and fifty-sixty Congresses,[[1]](#footnote-1) he had been the only white Black Person among the 357 representatives and 84 senators from 42 states. George H. White was the only black congressman at the turn of the 20th century, On the day he spoke, his legislative service was drawing to a close because he had chose not to run for a third term, seeing his chances of being re-elected as hopeless, so he gave his last speech on the floor of congress on January 29, 1901. It took another 28 years before another black representative sat in the congress.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The reasons why he addressed his speech was, with the rise of segregation, the discontinuation of the right to vote, and a vicious white supremacy campaign in his home state of North Carolina. He begins his speech by holding responsible the congressmen for the persistent discrimination against black men and misogyny against the black women. He also said that among all congressmen, none has been more persistence in their determination to bring the black man into disrepute and to show that H. White was unworthy of the right of citizenship than by his colleague from North Carolina,

Mr. Kitchin. He recounts to the people the sense of superiority Mr. Kitchin's actions reflected that white race was at all time and under all circumstances superior to the black by inheritance if not otherwise and also that an illiterate Negro was unfit to participate in law making and to be in the government; but an illiterate white man living by his side was fit to be in government by birth, because he was white and so he inherited some particular qualities.

Mr. White also addresses the fluctuation between votes and voters during the general election for state and country officers. Clearly offended by the comparison drawn by Mr. Otey's inference of whites as lions and blacks as lambs, Mr. White replies by pointing out how lamb signifies the purest of all souls existing and questions his discriminant deduction by quoting from the Bible that all men are made of the same flesh.

Mr. White's eye opening speech aims to bring forth the discrimination against black men in the entire political system. He puts forth statistics as to how in the most brutal circumstances, the black men shone out against all odds, as how the entire race bailed through something as brutal as slavery, yet didn't quite on hard work, evident in the impeccable hard work by the black to bring themselves up in the most inhabitable circumstances. The black's who in the face of Jim Crow's law (like separate schools, separate buses, separate graveyards etc.) [[3]](#footnote-3)rapidly improved and the country's condition have an underlying capability of achieving so much more under the racism-free ambience.

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The black Congressman fiercely speaks about the issue and addresses to us his futile attempts to bring about a change, for he seems to be the only concerned candidate in Congress about this profound issue. The deep rooted discrimination between black and white, even though it is completely irrational, persists in the society even after the heavy and difficult steps taken by the black men in circumstances no animal can survive.

1. Damon, Allan M. "George H. White: Farewell Address to Congress." Milestone Documents RSS. Schlager Group, Inc., n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Oxford University Press, “An Age of Progressive Reform”, in *American Horizons: U.S. History in Global Context (2013):780* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "Civil Rights for Kids: Jim Crow Laws."*Ducksters*. Technological Solutions, Inc. (TSI), Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Nov. 2014.  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)