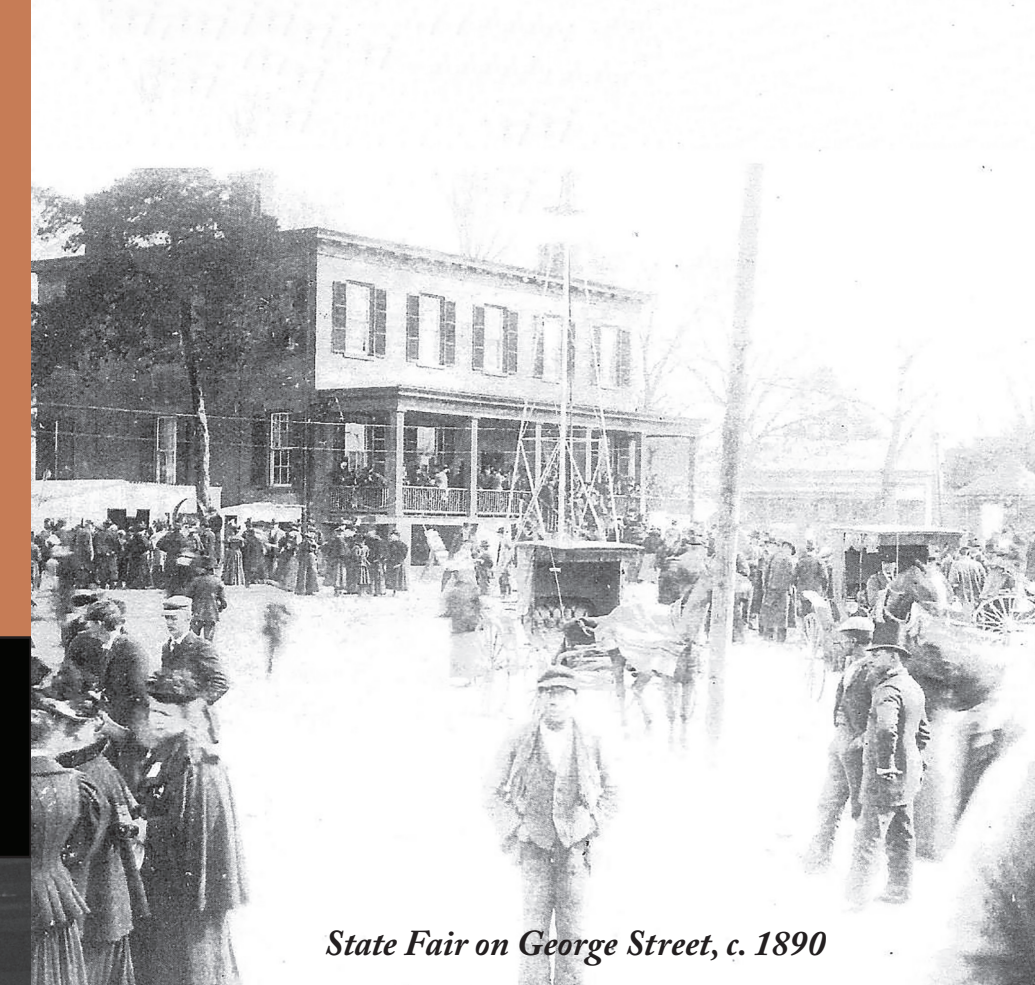
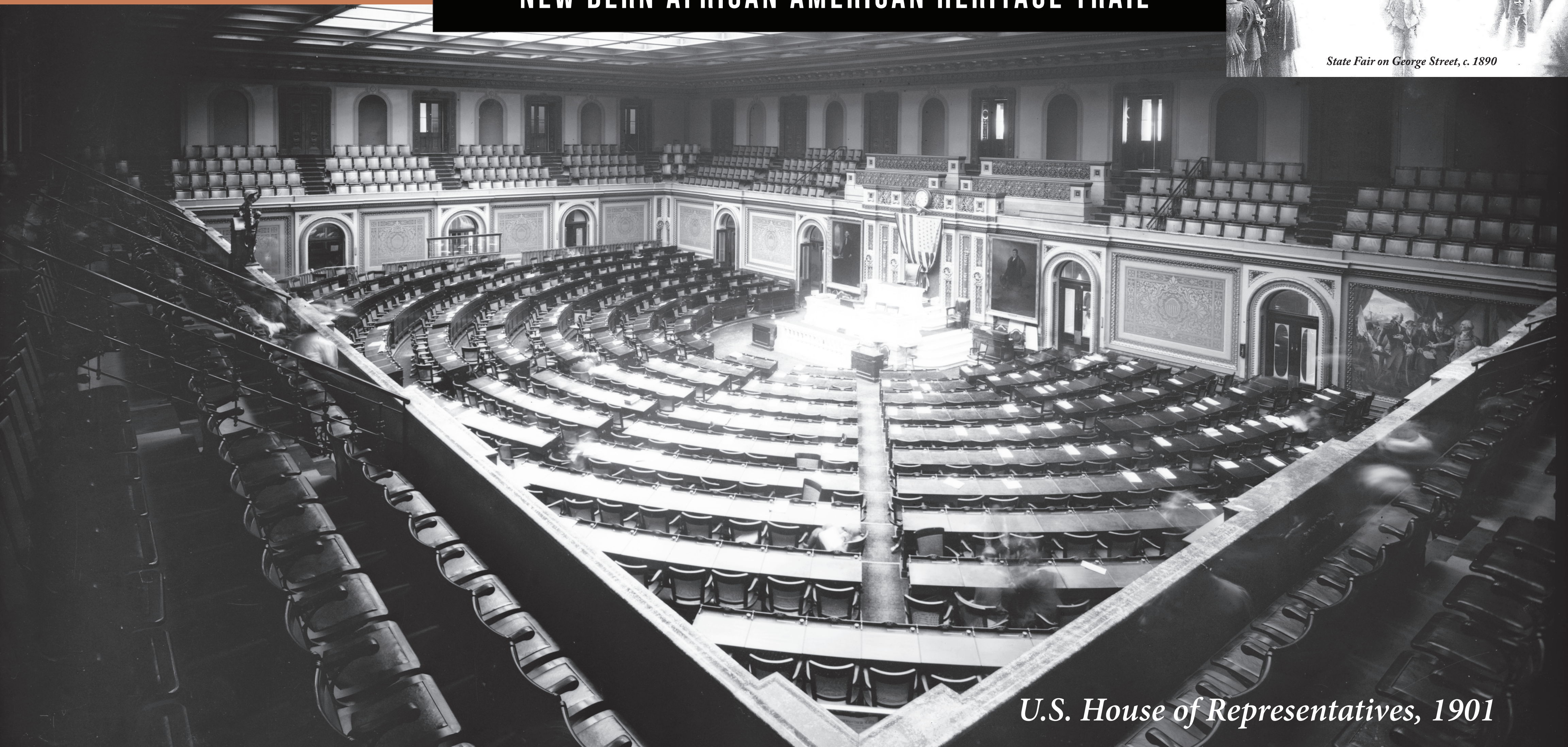


# Winds of Change

## NEW BERN AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL



State Fair on George Street, c. 1890



U.S. House of Representatives, 1901

*“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.”*

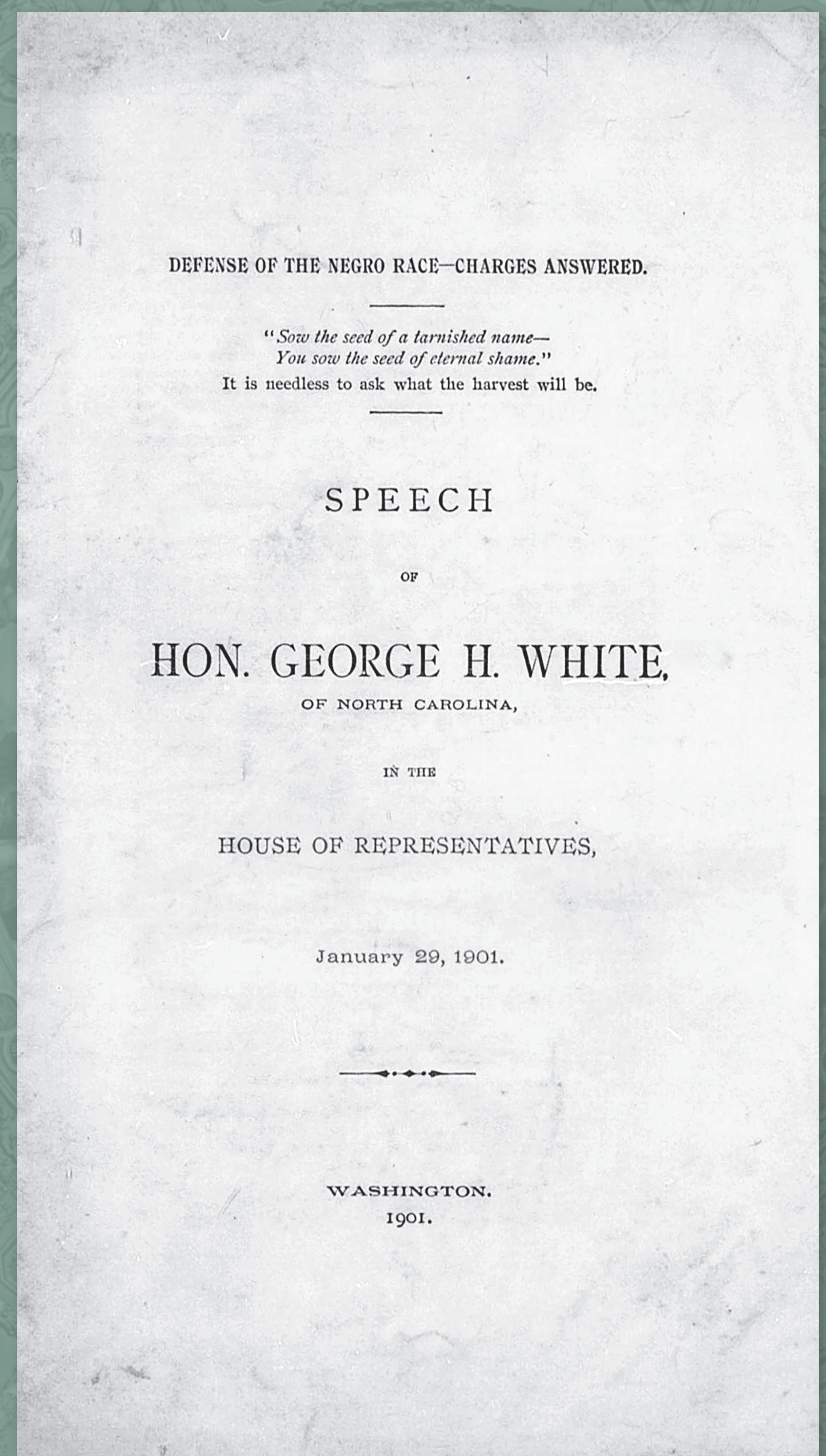
*Hon. George H. White*

*January 29, 1901*

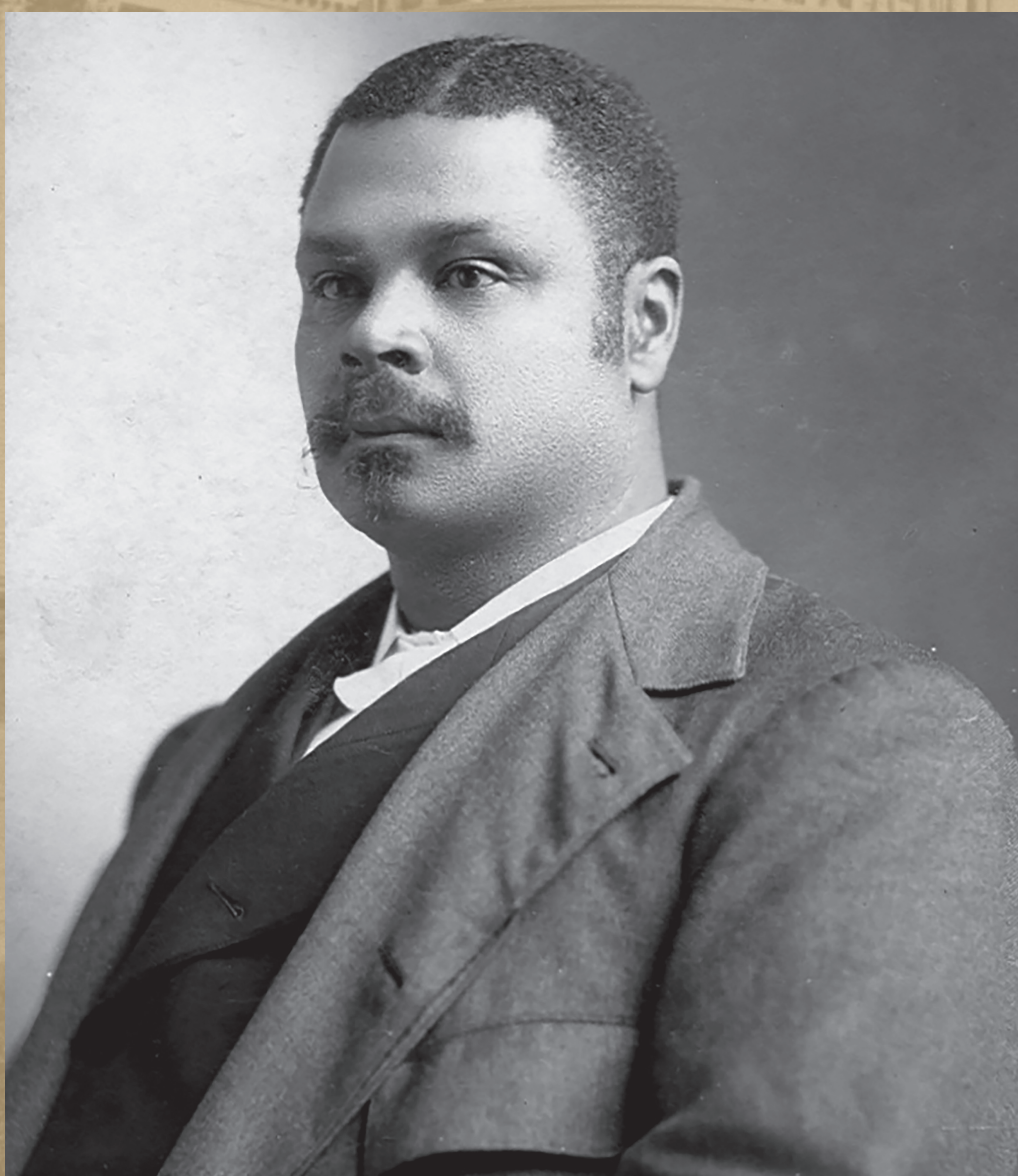
In the years immediately following the Civil War, African Americans throughout the South fought to obtain and preserve the freedoms won on the battlefields, in the statehouses, and in Congress. Black New Bernians were unusually energetic and successful in political life, especially between 1868 and 1876. Despite growing opposition, their activism continued through the end of the century. Between 1868 and 1898, Black New Bernians consistently won seats in the North Carolina legislature. For a time, they composed entirely or predominantly Black county delegations—one in 1868, three from 1870 through 1874, and one or two from 1876 through 1898.

## Disfranchisement

In both 1894 and 1896, dissatisfied White former Democrats allied with White and Black Republicans to challenge the Democratic Party’s post-Reconstruction hold on power. This coalition won a majority of seats in the state legislature and in 1896 the governorship. Determined to counter and end Black political activity, Democrats began a “White Supremacy Crusade” that reclaimed both houses in 1898 and the governor’s office in 1900. That same year, the North Carolina legislature voted to disfranchise more than 100,000 Black men using new literacy laws. As a consequence, only 4.6 percent of the state’s Black voters remained registered after 1902. In New Bern, the city’s charter was revoked, expunging the existing Republican representatives, most of whom were Black.



*On January 29, 1901, White delivered a farewell speech to the U.S. House of Representatives pleading for equal justice for Black Americans and predicting the eventual return of African Americans to Congress.*



*George H. White*

Images: Library of Congress, National Archives, New Bern Historical Society

## George H. White

The most prominent post-war political figure in late-nineteenth-century New Bern was George H. White. A successful educator and attorney, White was one of four Black congressmen elected to office following the end of Reconstruction (1877) from what was known as the “Black Second,” where the majority of county populations were African American. For several years he lived in New Bern, then moved to Tarboro when the district lines were re-gerrymandered. Following his terms in the North Carolina House (1880) and Senate (1884), he was elected to Congress in 1897 as the only Black member of the U.S. House of Representatives and the nation’s last Black congressman until 1929. White pushed, without success, for national anti-lynching legislation, attracting the ire of both parties. With his prospects for reelection diminished, he chose not to run and instead moved his family to Washington, D.C., then Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he died in 1918.