

Hyman, John A. (1840–1891)

North Carolina. Born a slave. Mulatto. Literate. Storekeeper, farmer.



North Carolina's first black congressman, Hyman was born a slave in Warren County and was taught to read and write by a Northern-born storekeeper. In 1861, he was sold to Alabama ("bought and sold as a brute," as he later wrote to Charles Sumner). Hyman returned to Warren County in 1865, received an elementary education, and became a trustee of the first public school in his area. He farmed and then opened a country store. According to the census of 1870, Hyman owned \$1,500 in real estate and \$2,000 in personal property. His store failed in 1872.

Hyman attended the state black convention of 1866 and the Republican state convention of 1867. He served as a voter registrar in 1867 and was elected to the constitutional convention of 1868. After unsuccessfully seeking the Republican nomination for Congress in North Carolina's "Black Second" Congressional District in 1868, Hyman was elected to the state Senate, serving 1868–74. In 1872, he wrote to Senator Sumner in support of his Civil Rights Bill: "The loyal colored citizens of North Carolina to a man sustain you in your course. There can be no grades of citizenship under the American flag." In 1874, Hyman was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and served in the 44th Congress, 1875–77. He failed to win reelection in 1876, returned to farming, and operated a liquor store. Because he sold liquor and was accused of embezzling church funds, Hyman was expelled from the Warrenton Colored Methodist Church. Hyman served briefly as special deputy internal revenue collector under President Hayes but was removed because of pressure from his opponents in North Carolina Republican politics. He unsuccessfully sought the nomination for his congressional seat in 1878 and may have worked for the Democrats in that election. Hyman helped to organize an arrangement in Warren County whereby

blacks voted for Democrats for county offices in exchange for Democrats allowing a few blacks to hold minor local posts. Between 1879 and 1889, constantly in debt, Hyman worked in Maryland as an assistant mail clerk, and then moved to Washington, D.C., where he was employed in the seed dispensary of the Department of Agriculture. He died in Washington.

Anderson, *Black Second*, 36–37, 45–50, 70, 87. Powell, *Dictionary*, III, 249–50. John Hyman to Charles Sumner, 24 January 1872, Charles Sumner Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Robert C. Kenzer, "The Black Businessman in the Postwar South: North Carolina, 1865–1880," *Business History Review*, 63 (1989), 76–77. KKK Hearings, North Carolina, 230. George W. Reid, "Four in Black: North Carolina's Black Congressmen, 1874–1901," *Journal of Negro History*, 64 (1976), 229–30.