19TH Century Studies

37/2025

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cover Image: Emma Soyer (née Jones) (English, 1813–42), *Two Children with a Book* (oil on canvas, 91.7 × 71.6 × 3.0 centimeters, 1831; on long-term loan to Tate, London). Photograph: Tate.

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Special Issue: Blackness, Race, and Racism in Nineteenth-Century Studies

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A. MAGGIE HAZARD, *GUEST EDITORS*

Articles

Book Review

Exhibition Review

Nineteenth Century Studies, Vol. 37/2025

https://doi.org/10.5325/ninecentstud.37.0065

"My Record Was Growing Blacker and Blacker": Race in Charles Chesnutt's "Nonracial" Short Stories

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ABSTRACT | In many of the early short stories of the African American writer Charles W. Chesnutt (1858–1932), the race of the characters is unmarked, so they are typically interpreted by readers as white. This article makes the case that these underdiscussed stories, written between 1885 and 1893, are not his "nonracial" apprentice work, meant to appeal to white readers by deliberately eschewing questions of race. Instead, Chesnutt subtly invites readers to see certain characters as white-presenting mixed-race people, and to question the assumptions made about these characters' ethnicity within the story-world. However, he does so without making passing the central theme or the threat of discovery the narrative impetus. Instead, he uses the very fact that such characters are never discovered to be Black to show that categories of race are arbitrary. Chesnutt's rarely discussed 1893 story "The Shadow of My Past" serves as the limit case that most clearly undermines the racist contention that "Black" and "white" are stable, inherently meaningful categories. While he questions this contention more explicitly in his later, better-known work, in which race relations and racism are central themes, Chesnutt's ostensibly "nonracial" early short fiction already points to the absurdity of racist essentialism.

KEYWORDS | Charles W. (Waddell) Chesnutt, 1858–1932, "The Shadow of My Past" (1893), white-presenting mixed-race characters in fiction / passing in fiction, late nineteenth-century short fiction (US American)

The Black writer Charles W. Chesnutt (1858–1932) is primarily known today for the fiction he published circa 1900, which revolves around questions of race and anti-Black racism in post-Reconstruction America. But his writing career was much longer; his earliest writings date back to the 1870s, and he was still writing fiction and nonfiction into the 1930s, although only a handful of short stories were published after

his last novel, *The Colonel's Dream*, appeared in 1905. The vast majority of his eighty known short stories were written and published between 1885 and 1893, years before his two story collections *The Conjure Woman* and *The Wife of His Youth* came out in 1899.[1] In many of these early stories, characters are not identified by race, and are thus almost invariably assumed to be white by readers past and present. This essay suggests a new look at these ostensibly "nonracial" stories, typically considered minor works and rarely addressed in Chesnutt scholarship. I will argue that they do not sidestep race; instead, they invite readers to interpret certain characters as mixed-race people even though they are assumed to be white within their environment. Chesnutt's subtle and hitherto overlooked invitation to read race "into" stories set in an apparently homogeneous white urban middle class in late nineteenth-century America shows him already engaged in his lifelong project of challenging arbitrary boundaries that served to separate Black and white. While this invitation is subtle enough to be missed in many of the early stories, Chesnutt's little-read 1893 "The Shadow of My Past" will serve as my limit case to show how far Chesnutt was able to push this strategy, which, as early as the mid-1880s and into the 1890s, unravels the very premise of essentialist racial categories that struck him as absurd throughout his life.

Most Chesnutt scholarship to date deals with texts in which he addressed race and racism explicitly—understandably so, since there is no dearth of material. Many of his short stories, his three published novels, and three of his six unpublished novels, as well as a number of essays and speeches, explicitly center race. When it comes to the short fiction, scholars have primarily concentrated on the Uncle Julius stories, in which the antebellum folktale in the manner of Joel Chandler Harris received a new, subversive context. Secondarily, scholarly discussion has addressed the "stories of the color line" (the subtitle of Chesnutt's collection *The Wife of His Youth*) about postbellum Black life and race relations in North and South. By contrast, many of his early stories are rarely studied or reprinted because they are, at first sight, much less invested in addressing race and altogether beholden to those white audiences he was said to cater to.[2] But they deserve to be considered as the beginning of his exploration of narrative strategies, undertaken throughout his career, that were aimed to make his readers rethink and ultimately question all racial categorization. Chesnutt himself claimed retrospectively in 1931 that "substantially all of my writings, with the exception of *The Conjure Woman*, have dealt with the problems of people of mixed blood."[3] His early stories should be considered part of this focus rather than to lie beyond it.

When Chesnutt first launched his career as a writer in the 1880s, he did so with short stories and humorous sketches published exclusively in newspapers and magazines that were part of the white mainstream. Some of these addressed the Black experience before, during, and after the Civil War, but many others featured a cast of characters not identified by race at all. A little bean-counting might be useful here because the proportion of Chesnutt's stories in which race is not explicitly marked is sizable. Among the eighty known (and sixty-five published) short stories, thirty—over a third—fall unambiguously into this category. (In the stories published between 1885 and 1893 that are my focus here, the number rises to almost half, eighteen out of thirty-seven.)[4] While nine of these thirty remained unpublished (almost all likely written in the 1890s), of the twenty-one published stories in which characters are not identified by race, the vast majority—all but three—appeared between 1886 and 1893 in newspapers through McClure's syndicate and in weeklies that published short fiction and comic sketches, predominantly *Family Fiction* and *Puck* (see Table 1 for a more precise breakdown, including dates and publication venues).[5]

The reason that these stories are rarely (and in many cases never) discussed in the scholarship is that their presence in Chesnutt's oeuvre is a bit of an embarrassment. Not only do they seem to avoid addressing the very questions about race and racism that make Chesnutt's work so important; they also do not stand out in content and style among

Table 1 | Chesnutt's Complete Short Stories

A. CHESNUTT'S PUBLISHED STORIES (IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

TITLE	FIRST PUBLICATION DATE	PUBLICATION VENUE (OR MCCLURE SYNDICATION)	SOURCE ***	RACIALLY MARKED CHARACTERS?
Frisk's First Rat	20 March 1875	*Fayetteville Educator*	CWCA (no Render)	No
Tom's Adventures in New York	27 March–8 May 1875	*Fayetteville Educator* (7 installments)	****	No
Uncle Peter's House	7 December 1885	McClure syndication	CWCA	Yes
A Tight Boot	28 January 1886	McClure syndication	CWCA	Yes
A Bad Night	22 July 1886	McClure syndication	CWCA	Other
Two Wives	12 August 1886	McClure syndication	CWCA (no Render)	No
Tom's Warm Welcome	27 November 1886	*Family Fiction*	CWCA	Yes
The Fall of Adam	25 December 1886	*Family Fiction*	CWCA	Yes
A Woman and a Burglar / The Doctor's Wife	12 January 1887	McClure syndication	CWCA	No
A Busy Day in a Lawyer's Office	15 January 1887	*Tid-Bits*	CWCA	No
McDugald's Mule	15 January 1887	*Family Fiction*	CWCA	Other
How Dasdy Came Through	12 February 1887	*Family Fiction*	CWCA	Yes
A Soulless Corporation / Mrs. Lovelock's Trunk	16 April 1887	*Tid-Bits*	CWCA	No
Aunt Lucy's Search	16 April 1887	*Family Fiction*	CWCA	Yes
Appreciation	20 April 1887	*Puck*	CWCA	Yes
Wine and Water	23 April 1887	*Family Fiction*	CWCA	No
A Grass Widow	14 May 1887	*Family Fiction*	CWCA	No
Stranger Taken In / A Metropolitan Experience	26 May 1887	McClure syndication	CWCA	No
The Goophered Grapevine	August 1887	*Atlantic Monthly* *	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
A Virginia Chicken	August 1887	*The Household Realm*	CWCA *****	Yes
A Secret Ally	19 September 1887	McClure syndication	CWCA	No
She Reminded Him	21 September 1887	*Puck*	CWCA	No
A Midnight Adventure	6 December 1887	McClure syndication	CWCA	Other
A Doubtful Success	17 February 1888	McClure syndication	CWCA	No
Po' Sandy	May 1888	*Atlantic Monthly* *	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
An Eloquent Appeal	6 June 1888	*Puck*	CWCA	Yes

(*Continued*)

Table 1 | Chesnutt's Complete Short Stories (*Continued*)

TITLE	FIRST PUBLICATION DATE	PUBLICATION VENUE (OR MCCLURE SYNDICATION)	SOURCE ***	RACIALLY MARKED CHARACTERS?
Cartwright's Mistake	19 September 1888	McClure syndication	CWCA	No
A Fool's Paradise	24 November 1888	*Family Fiction*	CWCA	No
How a Good Man Went Wrong	28 November 1888	*Puck*	CWCA	No
Gratitude	26 December 1888	*Puck*	CWCA	No
The Origin of the Hatchet Story	24 April 1889	*Puck*	CWCA	Other
A Fatal Restriction	1 May 1889	*Puck*	CWCA	No
The Conjurer's Revenge	June 1889	*Overland Monthly* *	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
A Roman Antique	17 July 1889	*Puck*	CWCA	Yes
Dave's Neckliss	October 1889	*Atlantic Monthly*	CWCA	Yes
The Sheriff's Children	7 November 1889	*New York Independent* **	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
A Cause Célèbre	14 January 1891	*Puck*	CWCA	No
A Deep Sleeper	11 March 1893	*Two Tales*	CWCA	Yes
The Shadow of My Past	24 September 1893	McClure syndication	CWCA *****	No
The Wife of His Youth	July 1898	*Atlantic Monthly* **	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
Hot-Foot Hannibal	January 1899	*Atlantic Monthly* *	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
Mars Jeems's Nightmare	1899 [March]	*The Conjure Woman*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
Sis' Becky's Pickaninny	1899 [March]	*The Conjure Woman*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt	1899 [March]	*The Conjure Woman*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
The Bouquet	November 1889	*Atlantic Monthly* **	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
The Web of Circumstance	1899 [November]	*The Wife of His Youth*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
A Matter of Principle	1899 [November]	*The Wife of His Youth*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
Uncle Wellington's Wives	1899 [November]	*The Wife of His Youth*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
Cicely's Dream	1899 [November]	*The Wife of His Youth*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
Her Virginia Mammy	1899 [November]	*The Wife of His Youth*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
The Passing of Grandison	1899 [November]	*The Wife of His Youth*	CWCA (no Render)	Yes
Aunt Mimy's Son	1 March 1900	*The Youth's Companion*	CWCA	Yes

(*Continued*)

Table 1 | Chesnutt's Complete Short Stories (*Continued*)

TITLE	FIRST PUBLICATION DATE	PUBLICATION VENUE (OR MCCLURE SYNDICATION)	SOURCE ***	RACIALLY MARKED CHARACTERS?
Lonesome Ben	March 1900	*Southern Workman*	CWCA	Yes
A Victim of Heredity: or Why the Darkey Loves Chicken	July 1900	*Self-Culture: A Magazine of Knowledge*	CWCA	Yes
The Sway-Backed House	November 1900	*The Outlook*	CWCA	Yes
Tobe's Tribulations	November 1900	*The Southern Workman*	CWCA	Yes
The March of Progress	January 1901	*The Century*	CWCA	Yes
The Partners	May 1901	*Southern Workman*	CWCA	Yes
Baxter's Procrustes	June 1904	*Atlantic Monthly*	CWCA	No
The Prophet Peter	1 April 1906	*Hathaway-Brown Magazine*	CWCA	Yes
The Doll	April 1912	*The Crisis*	CWCA	Yes
My. Taylor's Funeral	April–May 1915	*The Crisis*	CWCA	Yes
The Marked Tree	December 1924–January 1925	*The Crisis*	CWCA	Yes
Concerning Father	May 1930	*The Crisis*	CWCA	Other
An Original Sentiment	unknown	unknown (newspaper clipping at Fisk University)	Render (not CWCA)	No

B. CHESNUTT'S UNPUBLISHED STORIES (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

TITLE	ARCHIVE	SOURCE	RACIALLY MARKED CHARACTERS?
The Averted Strike	Typescript, Fisk University	Render	Yes
The Dumb Witness	2 typescripts, Fisk University	Render	Yes
The Exception	Typescript, Fisk University	Render	No
An Expensive Amusement	Typescript, Fisk University	**N.pub.**	No
The Hand of God	Typescript, Western Reserve Historical Society	**N.pub.**	Yes
His Best Friends Said [untitled, first line]	Typescript, Fisk University	**N.pub.**	No
How He Met Her	Typescript, Fisk University	Render	No
Jim's Romance	Typescript, Western Reserve Historical Society	Render	No
John Pettifer's Ghost [incomplete]	2 typescripts, Fisk University	**N.pub.**	Yes
The Kiss	Typescript, Fisk University	Render	No
A Limb of Satan	2 typescripts, Fisk University	Render	Yes

(*Continued*)

Table 1 | Chesnutt's Complete Short Stories (*Continued*)

TITLE	ARCHIVE	SOURCE	RACIALLY MARKED CHARACTERS?
A Miscarriage of Justice	Typescript, Fisk University	Render	No
Stryker's Waterloo	Typescript, Fisk University	Render	No
Walter Knox's Record	Typescript and manuscript, Fisk University	Render	No
White Weeds	Typescript, Fisk University	Render	Yes

This table was created in consultation with Stephanie Browner, lead editor of the scholarly edition of *The Complete Short Stories*, forthcoming as the first volume of *The Writings of Charles W. Chesnutt* with Oxford University Press, which will include all eighty stories listed here, including the four not previously published.

Legend:

CWCA	Charles W. Chesnutt Archive (chesnuttarchive.org)
Render	Sylvia Lyons Render, ed., *The Short Fiction of Charles W.* Chesnutt (Howard University Press, 1974). If not otherwise marked, stories on CWCA are also included in Render, but not vice versa.
Other	See note 4 for these stories with debatable racial marking.
*	Also published as part of *The Conjure Woman* (1899)
**	Also published as part of *The Wife of His Youth* (1899)
***	Unless otherwise indicated, stories at the Charles W. Chesnutt Digital Archive (https://chesnuttarchive.org) can also be found in Render.
****	Installments 5 through 7 are available at https://www.digitalnc.org/newspapers/the-educator-fayetteville-n-c/; they are not included in Render or CWCA. See note 5.
*****	The version of the story in Render differs from CWCA. Her edition is based on the typescript at Fisk University, while the CWCA version is based on the published version.

thousands of other stories published in the periodical press in the late nineteenth century. Set mostly in vaguely Northern environments associated with the white middle class, they are often no more than sketches, sometimes with a mildly satirical twist, occasionally with a melodramatic element, and almost always with a harmonious resolution. Accordingly, Chesnutt scholar William Andrews dismissed them as Chesnutt's mediocre "nonracial" apprentice work in his seminal *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* in 1980. At first sight, they seem to belong to the same genre as Chesnutt's unpublished novels from the 1890s and early 1900s with similar settings (*A Business Career*, *Evelyn's Husband*, and *The Rainbow Chasers*), which Matthew Wilson has termed "white-life fiction," in which "African American writers [write] *exclusively* about white experience" and "which only incidentally contain people of color"—if they feature any at all.[6]

Scholars have struggled to make a case for the relevance of these ostensibly "nonracial" or "white-life" stories partly because they contribute to the unease about the complicated role race played biographically in Chesnutt's early career. They seem to reinforce the idea that in his attempt to break into publishing in the 1880s, he performed a sort of authorial passing, the importance of which has been debated extensively by Chesnutt scholars. It is not always clear whether (and if so, when) he disclosed his racial identity to publishers and editors before he revealed it to Houghton, Mifflin and Company in 1891, or before it became widely known among his readers in 1898.[7] Regardless of what his earlier publishers might have known, though, nothing in the pre-1898 stories or the bylines under which they were published would have informed readers about Chesnutt's race, while he would have been well aware of the fact that they were predominantly white. The longtime scholarly consensus

was that he literally banked on this. Chesnutt remarked in several letters on the fact that a white audience was the only path to financial as well as critical success, and Wilson argues that Chesnutt wrote the "white-life novels" specifically with the hope that they "would become popular successes with a white audience."[8] But it is problematic to posit that his primary motivation as a writer was the financial success that only this white audience could provide, as Tess Chakkalakal points out in her critique of this long-standing argument.[9] His desire to elevate white people—as he famously vowed to do in his journals when he mused about becoming a writer at age twenty-three—and the strategies he planned to employ to reach them need to be taken seriously:

> If I do write, I shall write for a purpose, a high, holy purpose, and this will inspire me to greater effort. The object of my writings would be not so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites,—for I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation . . . a barrier to the moral progress of the American people. . . . But the subtle almost indefinable feeling of repulsion toward the negro, which is common to most Americans—and easily enough accounted for—, cannot be stormed and taken by assault; the garrison will not capitulate: so their position must be mined, and we will find ourselves in their midst before they think it.

Chesnutt's early forays into making potential white readers look differently at race—as he continues in his journal, to "lead them on imperceptibly, unconsciously step by step to the desired state of feeling"—include these ostensibly "nonracial" stories.[10]

It is therefore reductive to assume these stories are "white-life fictions" in any straightforward way, even as they were written with a white audience in mind. They cautiously and somewhat obliquely subvert and question preconceived notions about who is "white," just like his early stories about Black life subvert ideas about who is "Black," even as they seemingly endorse racial stereotypes. All it takes is a reader who is willing to entertain the notion that some of the presumed white characters are mixed-race African Americans who are "white-presenting," to use an anachronistic term that is helpful here because it eschews assigning the agency implicit in the idea of "passing." Such "white-presenting" characters can be seen as either *passing* as white (in the sense of a deliberate act) or *taken* as white (without intending to or knowing themselves to be in that position), and for Chesnutt's purposes here, the distinction is not necessarily meaningful. Whiteness in these cases is in the eye of the beholder (or in the mind of the reader). If readers fall into the trap of thinking that they can unambiguously determine whether someone is "Black" or "white," they participate in a racist belief system that insists on a fixed and meaningful "color line."

This approach to reading Chesnutt's early stories may seem, at first glance, contrarian. It was, in fact, initially inspired by applying Judith Fetterley's idea of resisting a text's implied patriarchal and misogynist values to questions of race.[11] But it is writerly rather than readerly resistance that comes first here, enacted by a writer who was already determined to challenge these values. Chesnutt invites his audience with subtly but deliberately built-in cues to be resisting readers, and to question the values of the white world that he uses as his setting. If readers accept this invitation—in Peter Rabinowitz's terms, if they are willing to be a "discerning authorial audience"—the seemingly stable and hegemonic white world of the stories disintegrates and its racist underpinnings are exposed.[12] Once readers "see color," they can also see that taking for granted that everyone is white in these stories replicates in the reading experience precisely the mechanism of successful passing that occurs in the story-world, where white people also consistently assume that everyone who looks white is white. Realizing that some of the characters are white-presenting mixed-race characters is in turn profoundly threatening to the racist mainstay that one can and must separate "white" and "Black" unambiguously and that it is impossible for anyone "Black," no matter how "white" they look, to pass permanently and successfully

as white. Undetected passing reveals that the color line is permeable and fragile, and points to one of the biggest fears of white supremacy about miscegenation and "race amalgamation," as Chesnutt would have called it. In the racist discourse about passing and miscegenation, the mere idea that the difference between "The White and the Black" (the title of a 1901 Chesnutt essay that addresses this question on multiple levels) would not be detectable implied that white society could be infiltrated or contaminated by the invisible presence of Black people in its midst.[13]

The paradox, of course, is that the act of successfully passing is not a story per se. If a person of mixed race is never revealed as nonwhite, there is no suspense, no conflict, no drama. But a character's undiscovered, undramatic passing in a story (which then by definition has to be about something else) is in itself an act of resistance, since it refuses to engage with the cultural script for the story of passing as the tragedy of being discovered and, as a consequence of the white wrath that follows the discovery, cast out.[14] The problem with the tragic story of passing for Chesnutt was that it can serve to expose the racist underpinnings of his society, but in a way that offers no way out and ultimately confirms the racist assertion that the color line cannot be crossed. Chesnutt did engage with passing as a potentially tragic theme in his most successful novel, *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900). But he did so almost reluctantly, and possibly at the urging of his white editors. The short story "Rena Walden," from which *The House Behind the Cedars* emerged, was not initially about passing at all, but about colorism within the Black community, and even in the novel as published, John Walden/Warwick's passing is never revealed—unlike his sister Rena's, his story does not end tragically. Likewise, the unpublished novel *Mandy Oxendine*, in which Mandy's passing is the point of origin for a plot of rivaling love interests that turns violent, does not culminate in predictable tragedy for either Mandy or Tom, her light-skinned lover who insists on identifying as Black. At the end of the novel, the omniscient narrator leaves tantalizingly open whether after their marriage they "remain[ed] true to their own people" and migrated to a Black community in the North, or whether they "chose to sink their past in the gulf of oblivion, and sought in the great white world such a place as their talents and their virtues merited."[15] A handful of short stories also feature characters whose race is explicitly addressed as not clearly legible ("Cicely's Dream," "Her Virginia Mammy," and "White Weeds," all written between 1899 and 1904), but none of these are traditional stories of passing, and while all three are serious in tone, they end happily for the characters themselves.[16]

By contrast, in the early stories, the underlying invisible given is not "white life" per se, but the possible presence of white-presenting mixed-race characters who lead this "white life." To be clear: I am not making an argument for an anachronistic twenty-first-century reading of the story in which Chesnutt invites readers to perform a sort of color-blind casting, where every character could be assigned any ethnic identity or skin color. These stories are set in a Northern urban environment that is clearly legible as "white," and a nonwhite character would need to pass as white to fit into that environment. Neither is Chesnutt a proto–Toni Morrison. He does not set out to eliminate "all racial codes" and "disrupt the assumptions of racial discourse" to "deactivate the power of racially inflected strategies" by deliberately rendering the ethnic background of multiple characters ambiguous to force the readers to become aware of their internalized racist biases, as Morrison did most notably in her 1983 short story "Recitatif" and in her novel *Paradise*.[17] Instead, Chesnutt more simply suggests that not everyone who "looks white" is necessarily white, in the hope that a reader who realizes that whiteness is in the eye of the beholder will come to see racial categories of "Black" and "white" as ultimately meaningless.

Chesnutt enables readers who are willing to perform this act of resistance and see that such characters would engage in the "double vision of one whose racial antecedents placed him on the color line rather than on either side of it," which mirrors Chesnutt's own experience as someone who defied racial categorization.[18] As Chesnutt scholars habitually point out,

being indistinguishable on sight from a white man was part of Chesnutt's identity and of his impetus to write, and especially to write about mixed-race people in a similar predicament. There is no question that his focus on white-presenting Black characters (especially "octoroons" who were seven-eighths white) sometimes verges on colorism—also widely discussed in Chesnutt scholarship—but the logical consequence of his challenge to the "color line" is always the wholesale collapse of the racial binary. Chesnutt was never under any illusion about what it meant to be white-presenting but not white in the United States of the post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras; as he wrote to white novelist Carl Van Vechten in 1926, "by blood I am white, with a slight and imperceptible dark strain, which in any really civilized country would have no bearing whatever on my life or career."[19]

The bearing it did have on him in the United States was indelibly impressed on him from a young age. At age seventeen, he noted in a journal entry that "twice to-day, or oftener I have been taken for 'white'" by whites; in the same entry, he briefly contemplated leaving his hometown of Fayetteville, North Carolina, to "pass anyhow, for I am as white as any of them."[20] Five years later, in January 1881, he recorded what a Black acquaintance, Robert Hill, reported to him: Hill had been quizzed about Chesnutt's background by a white man, John McLaughlin, who objected to the fact that Chesnutt, then already a school principal, thought of himself "as good as a white man" in training and education. Hill "went to argue about the equality of intelligence and so on, but McL. wound up with this declaration, which embodies the opinion of the South on the 'Negro Question.' 'Well he's a nigger; and with me a nigger is a nigger, and nothing in the world can make him anything else but a nigger.'"[21] Less overtly racist white observers still invariably signaled their discomfort with being unable to see Chesnutt's Blackness and having to "know" that he was Black. A year after Chesnutt recorded McLaughlin's statement, the *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) highlighted him as the principal of North Carolina's State Colored Normal School in Fayetteville: "Chesnutt, it is said, speaks French and German fluently. He is nearly white, and is exceedingly gentlemanly in his demeanor." But the reporter then hastened to reassure its white readers that "He is very modest and unpresuming" and focused on "doing much for his race" within the confines of his Black school.[22] Nearly twenty years later, in 1901, William Dean Howells noted that "Mr. Chesnutt, to the unskilled eye, is entirely white" in a review of his biography of Frederick Douglass, and mused in a letter to a friend that Chesnutt "is a Negro, though you wouldn't know it from seeing him," and "writes of the black and white situation with an awful bitterness. . . . How such a Negro must hate us." In these private remarks, but also in his negative review of Chesnutt's 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition* as "bitter, bitter," Howells signals that Chesnutt had become uncomfortably direct in his criticism of white supremacy and segregation in the aftermath of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and of the Wilmington Coup and Massacre of 1898.[23]

Chesnutt's experience of being categorized as Black while appearing white in a world in which racial categories mattered so much was not at all unusual. He had numerous family members, friends, and acquaintances in North and South alike who shared this experience of living as nearly white, but never accepted it as such. He described this community (and its colorism) in gently satirical terms as the "Blue Vein Society" in three of the stories in *The Wife of His Youth*. The mixed-race community of Groveland, the barely veiled Cleveland, Ohio, where Chesnutt lived from 1883 until his death in 1932, provides the implicit setting for "Her Virginia Mammy." Its members are described by Clara, the main character who ironically believes she is white but is in fact mixed-race, as people whom she "would have passed on the street without a second glance, and among them were several whom she had known by sight for years, but had never dreamed of as being colored people." The narrator of "A Matter of Principle" also notes that the characters' self-consciousness about being categorized as Black always makes a difference. The "Blue Vein" Clayton family has a "social refuge in a little society of people like

themselves," but as members of otherwise white organizations they were "treated, in their capacity of [*sic*] members, with a courtesy and consideration *scarcely* different from that accorded to other citizens."[24] It is possible that the cues Chesnutt built into his racially unmarked stories began as a sort of in-joke for this specific subset of his readers who, like him, knew firsthand the absurd experience of maneuvering a world in which they were treated completely differently depending on whether their interlocutors saw them as white or as Black.

Identifying such cues, in-jokes or not, can make any reader realize that these stories dismantle the essentialism of racial categories that Chesnutt sought to challenge throughout his life in his fiction and his essays alike. The most basic clue for readers that certain characters in these early stories might not be white is that they are not well-known in their surroundings, so that passing without ever being exposed would be easy. They are described as having newly arrived in a city where no one knows them (like the character-narrator in "Stranger Taken In" who has just come to New York City); their current friends or spouses often remain completely separate from old acquaintances that the character might run into (a motif in "A Midnight Adventure" and "A Bad Night"); or they come from a distant, exotic location like California or the Wild West ("A Grass Widow" or "She Reminded Him"). Boardinghouses and hotels often feature as settings where the background not only of lodgers and hotel guests but also of landladies (and their marriage-age daughters) remains uncertain in terms of race or social class ("Cartwright's Mistake," "A Doubtful Success," "A Secret Ally"). Many stories focus on upward mobility, sometimes at a high cost, featuring characters eagerly climbing a career ladder to gain status ("Two Wives," "A Woman and A Burglar") or trying to cross class barriers by marriage (like Polly, the daughter of a boardinghouse landlady who marries up in "A Doubtful Success," or Paul in "A Fool's Paradise," who cannot marry the dubious socialite he is infatuated with until he inherits a fortune). Without reducing class to a metaphorical substitute for race and disregarding their function as distinct and mutually constitutive categories, I would argue that crossing of class barriers in these stories invites the reading of such characters as simultaneously crossing "the color line."

Even if the reader picks up on the hints about the racial otherness of the characters, though, these stories may seem ephemeral and conventional at first sight. Admittedly, there is nothing radical or subversive about the conventional middle-class values that undergird them. Some are morality tales pitched against adultery ("A Grass Widow"), corruption in the workplace ("Walter Knox's Record"), and the evils of drinking ("Wine and Water," "A Bad Night"). Others trade in humorous stereotypes of hapless suitors ("Cartwright's Mistake"), obnoxious wives ("An Original Sentiment"), gold diggers of both sexes ("A Fool's Paradise," "Stranger Taken in"), and young men who run up debt ("Two Wives"). But Chesnutt's insistence that these values and stereotypes can apply equally to characters who are not white but have taken their place in white society—that there is no special set of race-specific moral imperatives or stereotypes that applies to them—is not simply the kind of liberal universalizing humanism that made Chesnutt seem so old-fashioned and "assimilationist" by the 1960s.[25] His insistence that a clearly demarcated color line does not exist also means that he challenges the idea that there is an essential difference between Black and white stories. He refuses to accept that only certain stories can be told about Black people, that the moral imperatives of professional advancement and sexual conduct in such stories are different from those that operate in stories about white men and women, or that the humor in them needs to derive from blackface minstrelsy and plantation tales. By the same token, he challenges readers' expectations that "mulattoes" or "octoroons" must be tragic to invite empathy from white readers. While Chesnutt later developed an increasingly pointed critique from *within* these race-based conventions in his Uncle Julius stories, here, in these earlier works, he makes a simpler point—namely that if nothing distinguishes these characters from their white environment, their flaws and foibles are not race-specific, either. If a young man falls asleep

on a park bench after having had too much to drink, he is not an unruly Black man ("A Midnight Adventure"); if a young woman angles for her fiancé's father as a better catch ("A Doubtful Success"), she is not a hypersexualized "Jezebel" whose existence threatens white womanhood.

Admittedly, most of the stories mentioned thus far suggest such a reading quite subtly, as a mere possibility. Here, as elsewhere in Chesnutt's oeuvre, what Kenneth Price observed about the stories about race for the *Atlantic* and what Izabela Hopkins points out about the reviews of *The Wife of His Youth* holds true: Many white readers and reviewers did not pick up on the double-bottomed nature of these stories at all.[26] Chesnutt seemed to accept this as a given, likely aware that not all readers—and initially perhaps only those in his circle of acquaintance that were in on the joke—would take his suggestion. But in "The Shadow of My Past," his last story to be accepted for syndication before a five-year hiatus during which Chesnutt published nothing at all, the invitation to see the main character as white-presenting but not white is more transparently extended than anywhere else in Chesnutt's fiction. "The Shadow of My Past" is a limit case that shows how far Chesnutt could push this sometimes overly subtle approach. It boldly suggests the possibility that the "shadow" extended over the main character's reputation by his past is that he was once a Black boy, although he lives as a white man in adulthood.

"The Shadow of My Past" exists in two different versions and has a curious publication history. It was Chesnutt's last story (of eleven) to be syndicated. Samuel S. McClure accepted it for syndication in August 1893, telling Chesnutt, "I think I can use the tale." It was published through McClure's syndicate in September 1893 in two newspapers, and reprinted in a third six months later, in February 1895, but McClure apparently did not follow up with a payment upon publication, as he did with earlier stories. These three published versions were only recently discovered (in 2019), and it is likely that Chesnutt himself was not aware that the story was syndicated.[27] Beyond the lack of any payment record, three facts suggest that Chesnutt did not know that the story had been published by McClure: no clipping survives in the scrapbooks in the Charles W. Chesnutt Papers at Fisk University; he grouped it with nine other unpublished stories when he submitted the story to Houghton, Mifflin for a possible collection in 1897; and he revised and resubmitted the story in 1899, even though resubmission of published stories without permission was not his practice.[28] The rewritten story, two versions of which survive in typescript form at Fisk, was submitted six years later to *The Youth's Companion* and rejected on 21 December 1899. The surviving typescripts in turn became the basis of the story in Sylvia Lyons Render's *Short Fiction*, the first posthumous publication of the story.[29]

I will return to the significant changes Chesnutt made to the narrative frame of "The Shadow of My Past" for *The Youth's Companion*, but in the 1893 version of the story as published by McClure, the plot unfolds as follows. The main character and narrator, a successful bank clerk in his mid-thirties named Henry Skinner, decides in the late 1880s to visit Greenville, the town he left at the age of seventeen, while on a solo fishing trip. He decides to go incognito, pretending to be a detective making inquiries about the orphan boy Hank who ran away after a tussle with his employer's children, and discovers that not just this family, but everyone in town (from his last surviving relative to his Sunday school teacher) remembers him as a scoundrel. Dismayed, he returns home and decides to set the record straight. He orchestrates a targeted public-relations campaign, sending press clippings to the Greenville newspaper about his recent promotion to the position of bank vice president and manager, his success as a public speaker, and his selection as a World's Fair commissioner. Eventually he is invited to speak as a celebrated former citizen, an occasion where the same people who thought he had murdered his mother, burned down his home, and robbed his employer before running away now tell him how proud they are of him and his accomplishments.

It is easy to read this story as a racial allegory, which is what Charles Duncan did in the

only sustained analysis to date. Writing of the revised 1899 version of the story in Render's *Short Fiction* (the only known version at the time) and calling it "one of Chesnutt's most underrated works," Duncan reads Hank unambiguously as a white man who "overcome[s] . . . *figural* 'blackness'" while Black characters in stories like "Uncle Wellington's Wives" and "Cicely's Dream" "cannot erase the[ir] *literal* 'blackness.'" But I would hold that in both versions of the story, race is addressed not allegorically, but literally. Hank is not a "white narrator-protagonist" whose fragmented self is a *metaphor* for the double self of the Black person in a white world, but literally a person of color experiencing this double self, as a white-presenting mixed-race boy who is remembered in his hometown as the bad Black kid who ran away, until he can convince the community that he has always-already been white, because only a white man can, in their eyes, possibly succeed in society the way Hank has.[30]

Hank's backstory, as provided by himself, is hard not to read as a story of passing. It describes him as running away from the poverty and misfortune he experienced in his hometown to a new environment where no one knows him and in which he "attained a fairly good position in life."[31] Chesnutt reduplicates this transformation by making Hank return to Greenville as neither his new self or his boy self, but as a detective (complete with an alias) who makes inquiries about Hank. This second round of taking on a new identity—premeditated on the train ride—is more explicitly a story of passing, in which Hank runs the risk of being discovered, although he never is. Chesnutt also forcefully nudges the readers to see Hank as doubly passing in terms of race by a string of puns, beginning and ending with the "shadow" of the title with its barely concealed racial undertones. When Hank uses the phrase after he has returned home, and wonders how he can escape "the shadow of my past," the image evokes removing something that darkens his experience—that is, literally Hank's Black ancestry—from his life. On-the-nose idioms playing on "black," with all their negative connotations activated, come up several times. Hank worries as he investigates that his "record was growing blacker and blacker" as a result of his interviews, and one of the townspeople describes the boy Hank as "the black sheep o' the flock." He also uses terms for his own past appearance that are explicitly coded at the time as indicating mixed race when he tries to jog an old shoemaker's memory by reminding him that the boy Hank was not a redhead but had "black eyes and curly black hair."[32] Even his full name in the 1893 version, Henry Clay Skinner, humorously draws attention to the idea that we should pay attention to his skin and at the same time to its ambiguous color: What *is* the color of clay, exactly? (Not incidentally, Chesnutt's "Lonesome Ben," also written in the 1890s, revolves in macabre ways around the deadly effects of consuming clay, which turns Ben's black skin yellow but eventually kills him by turning him into clay; drafts of the story also included an elaborate in-joke on skin-lightening cosmetics).[33]

There is a hitch, however. If readers follow Chesnutt's lead and see the narrator as a white-presenting man of mixed race, they end up in a spot that defies narrative logic, even in a story full of comic exaggeration—regardless of whether Hank is seen as ignorant or as aware of his mixed-race background. If Hank is unaware, how could he have possibly grown up without noticing that he was perceived as Black in his hometown before running away? But if he knows that he is of mixed race (and thus an unreliable narrator who conceals this awareness from his readers), how can he be surprised about a reputation that is easily explained by his being seen as Black? How could he not have noticed that being mixed-race made a difference in the way he was treated as a boy? At the risk of breaking with verisimilitude, Chesnutt leaves both possibilities open in order to point to what he had already called "the manifest absurdity" of insisting on a clear-cut boundary between Black and white in his 1889 essay "What Is a White Man?" By 1900 he was calling the color line a "social fiction," specifically with regard to anyone "seven-eighths white," who is "really much more a white man."[34]

In works of fiction in which the color line, with all its absurdities, is an explicit theme,

Chesnutt often provides elaborate backstories that may also obtain for Hank, but remain unexplained here. Some mixed-race characters are unaware that they are not white (Clara Hohlfelder in "Her Virginia Mammy," Dan Hunt in the incomplete, unpublished "John Pettifer's Ghost"). But Chesnutt also inverts this scenario and creates characters who are long unaware that they *are* in fact white, while they believed themselves to be mixed-race (in "Cicely's Dream" and two of his unpublished novels).[35] And if Hank is read as a mixed-race man who is aware of his background but expressly resistant to the idea that it should matter, he shares many traits with the young John Walden in *The House Behind the Cedars*, who knows his family history but nonetheless insists that he is white ("There are white people darker than I am," Walden tells Judge Straight, recalling the seventeen-year-old Chesnutt's own defiant "I am as white as any of them") and subsequently passes successfully, renaming himself John Warwick.[36] Even the notion that readers can simply never know whether Hank is "Black" has a correlate in a story that turns on the impossibility of racial categorization. In the unpublished "White Weeds," Marian Carson's refusal to answer her white husband's question about whether she has mixed-race ancestry is replicated in Chesnutt's refusal to provide the reader with a definitive answer. The final backhanded "revelation" of her race (in possibly unreliable character speech) is that "her blood is as entirely pure as [her husband] Professor Carson's could have been" and "quite as good, as that of most old American families."[37]

Because race is explicitly present in these stories, Chesnutt is able to expose the arbitrariness of the color line and the obsession of whites with fixed racial categories with backstories that do not break with verisimilitude—even when these back stories border on the unbelievable by featuring mysterious foundlings, amnesia, lost documents, anonymous letters, and the like. But in "The Shadow of My Past," his desire to write a story where the racial identity of the character is not marked puts him in a bind. He cannot offer anything remotely resembling a realistic explanation for the difference between Hank's sense of himself and the stories he is hearing about his past. As one person after another tells the alleged detective about the heinous crimes Hank is supposed to have committed as a boy, he comes to doubt himself: "Had I really been so much worse than other boys as to forfeit the toleration extended toward the faults of youth? I could not believe that I had poisoned my brother, or shot my father, or burned up my mother; but might I not have been guilty of some of the minor offenses charged against me? Had I been laboring under a delusion in thinking myself at least as good as the average man?" These self-doubts culminate in a long reflection:

> I had read of people who possessed a double consciousness; who would leave their homes for weeks or months at a time, lead an entirely different life from their ordinary one, and then reappear in their homes with no recollection of what had happened in the meantime. Had I been the victim of some such mental phenomenon? I sat down and pieced together the fragments of my life, but could find no gaps of sufficient duration to have allowed me to commit half the crimes of which I was suspected. I was evidently the victim of some fatal misunderstanding.[38]

Even though learning about his awful reputation in Greenville thus leads Hank to the brink of an existential crisis, this moment of complete bafflement never results in his realization that he used to be perceived as Black or (if he is already aware of it) that his mixed-race status made a difference he has hitherto refused to accept. That said, the term "double consciousness" necessarily jumps out here because W. E. B. Du Bois famously adopted it for the double sense of self experienced by Black people in a racist white world. But the phrase first appeared in his 1897 essay "Strivings of the Negro People" for the *Atlantic*, four years *after* Chesnutt's story was published, so it had not yet accrued its specific race connotations.[39] In the popular medical and psychological discourse of the 1880s and early 1890s, "double consciousness" was used much as Chesnutt does here, for a condition in which someone was revealed (sometimes through hypnosis) to lead two

separate lives without any awareness of this fact. Newspapers in the 1880s and 1890s reported with fascination on such cases, which today might be diagnosed as dissociative identity disorder. The notion was also sometimes extended to everyone's "strange sense . . . of a kind of twin self like and yet unlike the person as we are held by the world and known to be by ourselves," for which Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* became the inevitable if imprecise literary correlate.[40] But if we read Hank's moment of crisis as his being on the verge of discovering that his "ordinary" life is that of a white man who is a pillar of his community, while the "entirely different life" is that of a Black man, seen as a threat to society and infinitely capable of heinous crimes, Chesnutt inches toward a use of the term that anticipates Du Bois's. Indeed, Hank's reflections map onto the baffling experience Du Bois describes, of becoming aware of being perceived as Black "in the early days of rollicking boyhood" with which he begins "Strivings of the Negro People," where he first defined "double-consciousness" as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." Like Chesnutt, Du Bois exploits the connotations of a linguistic cliché that aligns Black and white with darkness and light when he describes the pivotal experience of being made aware that he was different from his white classmates because of his race as the moment "when the shadow swept across me."[41]

But ultimately, Hank, unlike Du Bois's boy self, never understands that the "fatal misunderstanding" that makes everyone perceive him as a scoundrel could have to do with race.[42] After his agonizing but aimless reflection, the narrative veers instead into its absurdly comic and conciliatory conclusion as Chesnutt, in his most willful abandonment of verisimilitude, makes the Greenville citizens able to forget Hank's former Blackness. The fact that Hank can induce Greenville to accept him as white with his public-relations campaign defies the racist essentialism that insists that Black ancestry always overrides the visual evidence of skin color. It exposes the dead end that the compartmentalized thinking of Hank's "old friends" entails: Because they can only see him as either white or Black, they have to conclude on the basis of his success in a white world that he must have been white all along. But this absurd turn of the story is not simply comic exaggeration in the service of a thinly veiled satire of racist categories. Deciding on whether a person was "white" or "Black" based on reputation was actually baked into Southern racist laws and legal practices that Chesnutt knew very well and wrote about at length in "What Is a White Man?" Here, Chesnutt quoted from two decisions of the Supreme Court of South Carolina, which decided that juries could declare someone white "in whom the admixture of African blood did not exceed the proportion of one-eighth" but held that this decision could be based on evidence not only of "features and complexion" but importantly of "reputation as to parentage, and the evidence of the rank and station in society" of the person in question. What Hank has in effect done is to provide his jury, the citizens of Greenville, with such evidence of rank and station, and of his "exercise of the privileges of the white man," as it was phrased in the other court opinion from which Chesnutt quotes in his essay.[43]

A hint that, for Hank, the idea that one's socially perceived identity is dependent on external perception remains as bizarre and puzzling as Chesnutt first exposes it to be in "What Is a White Man?" appears in the anticlimactic conclusion to his story, where he confirms that his reputation is now safe, but cannot explain why: "I left Greenville a new man. The shadow that had clouded my mind was lifted, and I felt that henceforth I could walk the earth without any fear of my past record. I have no complaint to make of my old friends. Some people might call them disingenuous, or inconsistent, but I suspect that their conduct could be more charitably explained. I do not think, however, that I shall ever travel again under an assumed name."[44] Hank's inability to provide an explanation for the behavior of the Greenville citizens shows yet again that he cannot fathom having been considered Black (or, if he knows that he is of mixed race but chooses to conceal it from

the readers, is unable to see that being of mixed race should have such a disastrous effect on his reputation). Hank can only "suspect" that there is an explanation, so he ultimately leaves it up to the reader to come up with a "charitable" one—or perhaps, as the case may be, to interpret Greenville's change of opinion *uncharitably* as exposing the seams of a racist society.

When Chesnutt revised the story for submission to *The Youth's Companion* in 1899, this conclusion was quite heavily revised, which suggests that he may not have been satisfied with the ending. To understand the full significance of this revision, though, it is important to see it in the context of the overall thrust of the 1899 version. Chesnutt rewrote "The Shadow of My Past" with a view to a different audience, based on suggestions in the circulars Chesnutt received at least twice from *The Youth's Companion* about the kinds of fiction the magazine was looking for: "pathos, humor, adventure, heroism, with uncommon or with every day events," not "distinctly juvenile" but for "the whole household," still with an eye to boys and girls.[45] For Chesnutt, following these instructions meant a wholesale revision of the narrative frame, even as the story itself remained fundamentally the same, including the invitation to read it as a story about a mixed-race man. While the 1893 story had featured a married, well-established bank cashier (and later manager) in his mid-thirties learning about the shadow of his past, in the 1899 revision, Hank Skinner is now in his mid-twenties, just starting out in his career in a bank, engaged to a young woman of higher social status, and eager to ascertain his reputation so her father, his employer, will not hear anything about him that could prevent the marriage. The present time of the story in the revised version is also moved up to be closer to the new readers' present time, so that instead of taking place in the late 1880s, it occurs in the late 1890s, with Hank's childhood falling into the mid-1880s rather than the late 1860s.[46]

An allusion to the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in the earlier version is accordingly cut and replaced by one to the Spanish-American War, although both allusions stand out in each version as the only direct historical reference and serve as important temporal anchors that evoke a race-related subtext. In the story as published in 1893, the pointed reference is to the narrator becoming "one of the World's Fair Commissioners" (along with being chosen as vice president and manager of his bank and addressing the local debating society).[47] Chesnutt visited the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in the summer of 1893 with his wife, Susan, and so did not engage in the boycott of the exhibition spearheaded by Ida B. Wells, though no comments by Chesnutt survive on the issues that prompted the call for that boycott: the exclusion of Blacks and other racial minorities from the board of commissioners (which were presidential appointments from all states and territories) and from the exhibition staff, and the refusal to create dedicated exhibits about the Black community. But he was surely aware of the ongoing debate among Black activists, some of whom welcomed Frederick Douglass's widely reported presence during Colored People's Day, while others, Wells among them, dismissed the day as racist spectacle. Chesnutt's decision to make his possibly nonwhite narrator ascend to the commission can be read as a subtle dig at the discriminatory practices that surrounded the World's Fair.[48]

The 1899 version has a similar racially fraught historical allusion, although it is a bit less specific. When the younger Hank of that version, on his way out of Greenville, ponders his "plan for the redemption of my reputation" that he can put together before his fiancée Ethel and her father return from four months in Europe, he casually observes that "it was before the war, and the path to fame was not so easy as in peacetime."[49] This reference to the recent Spanish-American War (April–December 1898) might simply remind an 1899 reader that this is one of *The Youth's Companion*'s stories not about "heroism" but about an "every day" man, in this case, a junior employee in his prospective father-in-law's bank. But the possibly superfluous "as" (making ambiguous whether is it easier to become an instant hero in times of war than in peacetime or vice versa) can also serve as a sly reminder that for Black men,

the "path to fame" was as powerfully blocked in the US military as it was in the world of business and banking, if not more so. Of the approximately 2,500 Black men who fought in the Spanish-American War, in strictly segregated regiments, only five earned a Medal of Honor, and becoming an officer was still nearly impossible—there were only three in the regular army by the time the war broke out.[50] Chesnutt, who at fifteen had been rejected as a cadet for the US Naval Academy in Annapolis in spite of passing the examination with flying colors, knew this very well. He was keenly aware of the horrendous treatment of two Black cadets at West Point in the 1870s, and although he only referred to the Spanish-American War a handful of times, he commented frequently on the discrimination against Black officers and enlisted men in the military, and would have known, when revising the story in 1899, that the Buffalo Soldiers briefly lionized in 1898 returned to continuing segregation and renewed discrimination immediately after the war. As late as 1928, he still commented pointedly on the fact that Charles Young (1864–1922), the regular army's only Black officer in the Spanish-American War, should have been "made a general" instead of being denied the opportunity to serve in World War I.[51]

In other words, the allusion to the Spanish-American War performs the same function that the reference to World's Columbian Exhibition did in the story from 1893: underscoring the race-related subtext of the largely identical inner story about Hank's visit to Greenville. In the 1899 version of the story, Hank's decision to hide behind an alias is not premeditated on the train to Greenville and does not involve pretending to be a detective—it is a spur-of-the-moment decision after Hank learns from his first interlocutor in Greeneville about his bad reputation. But he still uses an alias, interviews the same old acquaintances, and hears the same accusations, mostly verbatim. His later publicity campaign is tailored to a less advanced career—he joins the chamber of commerce and delivers a speech there as a first proof of his emerging oratorical skills—but his triumph after delivering his speech in Greenville remains unchanged. So does the legibility of this story as that of a white-presenting mixed-race man, with all the narrative dead ends that the 1893 version entailed. Ultimately, though, Chesnutt tones down the extent to which Hank's interviews trigger an identity crisis: The paragraphs in which Chesnutt's 1893 narrator reflects on his "double-consciousness" are cut and replaced by a brief musing on the train about how to best redeem his reputation before his fiancée and her father return from Europe. It is unlikely that this cut was a deliberate attempt to avoid the association with Du Bois's use of the term, although Chesnutt (a regular reader of the *Atlantic* whose first story in the magazine had been published in 1887, and who was keenly aware of everything the journal published on the question of race) had surely read "Strivings of the Negro People." More probably, Chesnutt considered the passage as overly intellectual for his younger Hank and the anticipated audience of *The Youth's Companion*.

The only—very brief—reflection that Chesnutt allows his narrator in the 1899 revision comes in the revised conclusion, which echoes the language of the earlier version but redirects the emphasis to Hank taking control of his own reputation, with a sinister racially inflected hint at how much is at stake in doing so: "Thus the shadow of my past was lifted and I was able to face my *fiancée* and my future without fear. I never judged my old friends harshly. Human nature is much the same at all times and in all places, and my experience illustrates the consequences of giving a dog a bad name. But the reverse of the proverb is also true, although it takes a little longer time to make, and a little harder work to keep, a good name."[52] Even though Hank's tone remains as conciliatory toward the Greenville citizens as it had been in the earlier version, in the allusion to the proverb "to give a dog a bad name and hang him," Chesnutt conjures up the discomforting and racially charged specter of being hanged as the consequence of a (deserved or undeserved) bad reputation.[53] Chesnutt knew very well that such a "bad name" could be based on nothing more than being Black, so that the last sentence's focus on agency—on

making and keeping "a good name"—is the type of implausibly optimistic turn with which Chesnutt so often undercut his conclusions for the sake of a humorous punchline. If this cheerful about-face was meant as a moralistic reminder to the anticipated young readers of *The Youth's Companion* to work hard to earn a "good name" (like Hank does in both stories), it is also a non sequitur for a story in which someone is arbitrarily branded as a murderer, robber, and arsonist, especially by way of a proverb grimly suggesting that the ultimate result of being given such a reputation could be a lynching. This macabre undertone of the conclusion, in which "human nature is much the same" primarily in that it is both fickle and cruel in judging others, possibly simply because of their race, might have been the reason why the editor of *The Youth's Companion*, Mark Antony DeWolfe Howe, rejected the story. In his rejection letter, he told Chesnutt that, although "certainly an entertaining production," it was not right for the magazine: "It has a savor of cynicism about it, which—amusing as it is—seems to fit it better for columns in which human nature is not regarded so resolutely in its best light as in *The Companion*."[54]

No other racially unmarked story by Chesnutt goes quite as far as "The Shadow of My Past" in suggesting that the protagonist might be a white-presenting person of mixed race. Although it may seem that even in this story the suggestion is subtle, the idea that Hank might be of mixed race is reinforced by the fact that Chesnutt repurposed motifs from the story as he developed the subplot surrounding John Walden in *The House Behind the Cedars* in the years after 1895. As already discussed, John was a late addition to the drafts of *House*, and like Hank he insists that regardless of ancestry he is white because he presents as white.[55] He also runs away at age eighteen just like Hank, and most importantly, he returns incognito to his hometown, Patesville (Chesnutt's thinly veiled Fayetteville in many North Carolina stories), and registers in his hotel under his alias, John Warwick, clearly echoing Hank's secret visit to Greenville.[56] But unlike John, about whom the reader learns early on that he is a mixed-race man who is successfully passing, and who is certainly aware of his own racial background, Hank, whose race is not marked, remains a somewhat abstract thought experiment. His story is a way for Chesnutt (and the reader) to imagine what would happen if someone of mixed race, whether cognizant of his ancestry or not, never quite experienced the onset of double-consciousness that comes with the awareness of being perceived as racially Other. Given this clear connection to *The House Behind the Cedars*, "The Shadow of My Past" (especially its earlier, syndicated version) becomes a prelude to the more explicit treatment of mixed-race experience and of passing in Chesnutt's most successful novel and in the "color line" stories of the late 1890s collected in *The Wife of His Youth*.

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NOTES

1. All but seven of Chesnutt's uncollected stories, published and unpublished, were first edited and published by Sylvia Lyons Render as *The Short Fiction of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Howard University Press, 1974), now out of print. All but one of Chesnutt's published stories are now available digitally at the Charles W. Chesnutt Archive at https://www.chesnutt.org, which however does not include the unpublished stories. A scholarly edition of *The Complete Short Stories* is forthcoming as the first volume of *The Writings of Charles W. Chesnutt* with Oxford University Press, edited by Stephanie Browner, Richard Yarborough, Sarah Wagner-McCoy, and Antje Anderson.

2. The only scholar to date to address these stories as a group is Charles Duncan, *The Absent Man: The Narrative Craft of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Ohio University Press, 1998); Henry B. Wonham's *Charles W. Chesnutt: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Twayne, 1998) omits them altogether. Duncan is also the only editor after Render in *Short Fiction* to include a sizable sample from this group in a posthumous collection; see Charles Duncan, ed., *The Northern Stories of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Ohio University Press, 2004). The Library of America volume edited by Werner Sollors, *Charles W. Chesnutt: Stories, Novels, and Essays* (Literary Classics of the United States, 2002), includes the unpublished "The Kiss" as well as "Baxter's Procrustes," Chesnutt's last story for the *Atlantic* (June 1904); William L. Andrews, ed., *Collected Stories of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Mentor [Penguin], 1992), includes only the latter.

3. Charles W. Chesnutt, "Post-Bellum—Pre-Harlem," *Colophon*, part 5, February 1931, n. p.; see Joseph R. McElrath Jr., Robert C. Leitz III, and Jesse S. Crisler, eds., *Charles W. Chesnutt: Essays and Speeches* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 543–49, 547. The essay was also reprinted in *Crisis* 38, no. 6 (June 1931): 193–94.

4. I have excluded four stories from this count which technically mention race, but in which race relations between Black and white people are not the explicit theme. In "A Bad Night," a Black policeman is casually mentioned; in three additional stories, other ethnic groups are central: ancient Egyptians in the satirical sketch "The Origins of the Hatchet Story," Native Americans in "A Midnight Adventure," and, in Chesnutt's very last published story, "Concerning Father," a racially unmarked New England family's East Indian ancestor. In addition, "McDugald's Mule" is excluded, even though it has no explicit references to race, because the story shares a setting with "Tom's Warm Welcome," which makes clear that several characters that appear in the story are white Southerners. For obviously counting "White Weeds" as racially marked, even as it possibly features only white characters, see the later discussion. For publication dates and venues, see Table 1.

5. The remaining three are "Baxter's Procrustes" and two stories Chesnutt wrote as a teenager, published in 1875 in *The Educator*, a short-lived Black weekly in Fayetteville: "Frisk's First Rat" (*Fayetteville Educator* 1, no. 25, 20 March 1875, 2) and "Tom's Adventure in New York" (*Fayetteville Educator* 1, nos. 26–32, 27 March–1 May 1875, n.p. [only parts 5, 6, and 7 have been located]). See also Table 1.

6. William L. Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 18; Matthew Wilson, *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chesnutt* (University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 22, 20.

7. For the public disclosure of Chesnutt's ethnicity, see "Chronicle and Comment," *Bookman* 7, no. 6 (August 1898): 449–69, 452; Chesnutt's recollection of the sequence of events is included in Chesnutt, "Post-Bellum—Pre-Harlem," in *Essays and Speeches*, 547. It is not clear when exactly Chesnutt first mentioned his race to editors at Houghton, Mifflin (including those at its flagship publication, *The Atlantic Monthly*, which first published a story by him in 1887). But he deliberately spelled out that he was of mixed race when he pitched a story collection to the publisher in 1891; see letter to Houghton, Mifflin, 8 September 1891, in Robert C. Leitz, and Joseph R. McElrath, eds., *To Be An Author: Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt 1889–1905* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 75.

8. Matthew Wilson, introduction to *A Business Career*, by Charles W. Chesnutt (University Press of Mississippi, 2005), viii.

9. Tess Chakkalakal, "On First Looking into Charles Chesnutt's Homer," *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 304–305.

10. Charles W. Chesnutt, entry from 25 July 1880, in *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, ed. Richard Brodhead (Duke University Press, 1993), 139–40.

11. Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Indiana University Press, 1978), xiii, xix–xxiii; for the contemporary application and critique of her approach to questions of race, see "Revising, Rereading: *The Resisting Reader* and its Afterlives," ed. Yung-Hsing Wu, special issue, *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 13 (2021), especially Mari Jo Bona, "Fetterley's Feminist Blueprint for Resisting Scholars," 61–68, and E. L. McCallum, "The Desisting Reader," 84–92.

12. Peter Rabinowitz, "'Betraying the Sender': The Rhetoric and Ethics of Fragile Texts," *Narrative* 2, no. 3 (October 1994): 201–13, 203; see also Faye Halpern on variable reader interpretation and authorial intention in "The Goophered Grapevine," in "Charles Chesnutt, Rhetorical Passing, and the Flesh-and-Blood Author: A Case for Considering Authorial Intention," *Narrative* 30, no. 1 (January 2022): 47–66.

13. Charles W. Chesnutt, "The White and the Black," in *Essays and Speeches*, 139–44. For a discussion see Duncan, *Absent Man*, 27–33.

14. For a parallel argument about Chesnutt refusing to follow melodramatic conventions in creating "untragic mulatto" character Janet Miller in *The Marrow of Tradition*, see Stephen P. Knadler, "Untragic

Mulatto: Charles Chesnutt and the Discourse of Whiteness," *American Literary History* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 426–48, 431, 443.

15. Charles W. Chesnutt, *Mandy Oxendine*, ed. Charles Hackenberry (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 112.

16. "Cicely's Dream" and "Her Virginia Mammy" were included in *The Wife of His Youth*; "White Weeds" remained unpublished in his lifetime, rejected by Bliss Perry for the *Atlantic* and by Witter Bynner for *McClure's Magazine* in 1904 (see letters to Chesnutt from Perry, 17 March 1904, and from Bynner, 20 April 1904, Charles W. Chesnutt Papers, 1864–1938, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Papers, Fisk University). For a reading of "Her Virginia Mammy" and "White Weeds" as stories of passing, see Izabela Hopkins, "'Taken for 'White': Passing in Charles W. Chesnutt's Short Stories," *Mississippi Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2022): 37–59; 47–51.

17. Toni Morrison, foreword to *Paradise* (Vintage International, 2014), xi–xvii, xv, xvi.

18. Render, introduction to *Short Fiction*, 3.

19. Chesnutt to Van Vechten, 7 September 1926, quoted in Jesse S. Crisler, Robert C. Leitz III, and Joseph R. McElrath Jr., eds., *An Exemplary Citizen: Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt, 1906–1932* (Stanford University Press, 2002), 217.

20. Chesnutt, entry from 31 July 1875, in Brodhead, *Journals*, 78. By the following year, Chesnutt had already made the decision not to pass, but instead to "test the social problem" and prove that merit and perseverance could overcome racist prejudice, at least in the North (see entry from 3 April 1879, in Brodhead, *Journals* 106). Chesnutt's father, A. J., had likewise decided in the 1850s that he did not want to live "on the other side" when offered the opportunity, according to Chesnutt's half sister Anne Chesnutt Waddell, writing to Chesnutt's daughter Helen on 8 November 1938; see SallyAnn H. Ferguson, "Remembering Joe: Mentor, Editor, and Friend," *MELUS* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 9–13, 13.

21. Chesnutt, entry from 21 January 1881, in Brodhead, *Journals*, 160, 161.

22. R. B., "State Colored Normal School," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), Sunday, 25 June 1882.

23. W. D. Howells, "An Exemplary Citizen," *North American Review* 173, no. 537 (August 1901): 280–88, 280; Howells to Henry B. Fuller, 10 November 1901, quoted in Mildred Howells, ed., *A Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*, vol. 2 (Doubleday, Doran, 1928), 149; the review of *Marrow* is part of Howells's essay "A Psychological Counter-Current in Recent Fiction," *North American Review* 173, no. 541 (December 1901): 872–88, 882. For Howells's earlier review of both story collections, see "Charles W. Chesnutt's Stories," *Atlantic Monthly* 85, no. 512 (June 1900), 699–701.

24. Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Wife of His Youth* (Houghton, Mifflin, 1899), 37, 96, my emphasis. The third "Blue Vein" story is "The Wife of His Youth," the first story in the collection.

25. The phrase is Henry B. Wonham's, referencing among others Amiri Baraka for his dismissal of Chesnutt in the 1960s in "'The Curious Psychological Spectacle of a Mind Enslaved': Charles W. Chesnutt and Dialect Fiction" *Mississippi Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (Winter 1997–98): 55–69, 56. Crisler et al. argue that as early as the late 1920s, Chesnutt was seen as "displaying the shortcomings of pre-Modernist writers" with essentially Victorian values (introduction to *Exemplary Citizen*, xxv) and point to white critic John Chamberlain's remarks in "The Negro as Writer," *Bookman* 70 (February 1930): 603–11. Similar attitudes were also apparent in the rejection of his two late novels, *Paul Marchand, F.M.C* and *The Quarry* (in 1921 and 1931 respectively) by white editors at Houghton Mifflin, Alfred A. Knopf, and, in the case of *Paul Marchand*, also Harcourt-Brace (see Crisler et al., *Exemplary Citizen*, 150–51, 154–55, 157, 274–75, 239–40, 246). But Black writers and critics of the 1920s and 1930s typically praised Chesnutt as a pioneer of Black fiction. He received the NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn Medal, in 1928, and James Weldon Johnson encouraged and promoted his work on *The Quarry* (Crisler et al., *Exemplary Citizen*, 240n1). See also William S. Braithwaite, "The Negro in Literature," *Crisis* 28, no. 5 (September 1924): 204–10; and Sterling A. Brown, "In Memoriam: Charles W. Chesnutt," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 10 (December 1932): 387.

26. Kenneth Price, "Charles Chesnutt, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the Intersection of African-American Fiction and Elite Culture," in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (University Press of Virginia, 1995), 257–74, 266; Hopkins, "'Taken,'" 54–55.

27. Samuel S. McClure to Chesnutt on 25 August 1893 (see correspondence with McClure, Charles W. Chesnutt Papers, Fisk University). The three appearances of "The Shadow of My Past" in syndicated newspapers were identified in 2019 by Zach Turpin (University of Idaho), who graciously shared his notes on the discovery with me; the text used here is based on the text of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of Sunday, 24 September 1893, 15, available online at the Charles W. Chesnutt Archive (https://chesnuttarchive.org).

The text only differs minimally from the versions in the *Courier Journal* (Louisville, KY) of the same date (also p. 15) and the *Standard Union* (Brooklyn, NY) of Saturday, 16 February 1895 (p. 10). My complete collation identified just over 150 variants between the three texts, but fewer than a dozen are substantive, and none indicate Chesnutt's hand (see "Collations," in Chesnutt, *Complete Short Stories* [forthcoming]).

28. The S. S. McClure file at Fisk University does not contain any record of payment for the story, while McClure typically paid $5.00 per story upon publication. For the scrapbook contents, see Mildred Freeney and Mary T. Henry, *A List of Manuscripts, Published Works, and Related Items in the Charles Waddell Chesnutt Collection of the Erastus Milo Cravath Memorial Library, Fisk University* [n.p., 1954], 30–31. For the list of twenty stories sent to Houghton, Mifflin in 1898, see Helen Chesnutt, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line* (University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 83–84.

29. Mark Antony deWolfe Howe to Chesnutt, 21 December 1899; earlier that year, Howe had actively recruited and even accepted several stories by Chesnutt, but ultimately, only "Aunt Mimy's Son," accepted in May 1899 and printed in March 1900, was ever placed with the magazine (see correspondence with *The Youth's Companion*, Charles W. Chesnutt Papers, Fisk University). Render's version in Chesnutt, *Short Fiction*, 292–302 (with slight modernizations and silent emendations for spelling that are characteristic for her edition) was based on the two typescripts at Fisk, which were unavailable for inspection at the time of writing.

30. Duncan, *Absent Man,* 36, 45, 46.

31. Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15.

32. All three quotations are from Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15.

33. Included in the first of three fragmentary typescripts of "Lonesome Ben" (Charles W. Chesnutt Papers, Fisk University), 17–18; this first extant version of the story will be included in the forthcoming *Complete Short Stories* as an appendix. Other layers of allusion are the reference to the Kentucky statesman Henry Clay (1777–1852), whose reputation as an outstanding orator Chesnutt knew well (see one of Chesnutt's earliest speeches [October 1881], "The Advantages of a Well-Conducted Literary Society," in *Essays and Speeches*, 13–24, 17), and to Chesnutt's brother-in-law Henry Clay Tyson (1853–1926), who had a successful career as a civil servant and private secretary to one of the last Black congressmen of the nineteenth century in Washington, DC.

34. Chesnutt, "What Is a White Man?" in *Essays and Speeches*, 68–73; 69; Chesnutt, "The Future American: A Complete Race-Amalgamation Likely to Occur," in *Essays and Speeches*, 131–36, 134.

35. Chesnutt, "Her Virginia Mammy," in *Wife of His Youth*, 25–59; "John Pettifer's Ghost" (twelve-page typescript fragment, Charles W. Chesnutt Papers, Fisk University), 8. Chesnutt, "Cicely's Dream," in *Wife of His Youth*, 132–67, features an amnesiac white Union soldier who, taking the cues of his Black rescuers, believes himself to be a light-skinned Black man until his memory comes back. The two unpublished novels, *Paul Marchand, F.M.C.* (completed 1921) and *The Quarry* (completed 1928), revolve around white male protagonists who believe themselves to be mixed-race Blacks.

36. Charles W. Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars* (Houghton, Mifflin, 1900), 169–70, chap. 8; entry from 31 July 1875, in Brodhead, *Journals*, 78.

37. Chesnutt, "White Weeds," in *Short Fiction*, 391–404, 404. See Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 403–404.

38. Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15.

39. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Strivings of the Negro People," *Atlantic Monthly* 80, no. 478 (August 1897): 194–98, 194; later revised and published as a chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* (McClurg, 1903); see 3–5.

40. "Double Consciousness," *Public Opinion* 4, no. 50 (March 24, 1888): 582–83, crediting the London *Queen* (February 18, 1888), references Stevenson's novella without pointing to the obvious difference, i.e., that Jekyll/Hyde is at all times aware of his two identities.

41. Du Bois, "Strivings," 194.

42. Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15.

43. Chesnutt, "What Is a White Man?" in *Essays and Speeches*, 70–71. Chesnutt has Judge Straight quote from the same decision in *The House Behind the Cedars* (172, chap. 8). On his repurposing of the essay in the novel, see Melissa Ryan, "Rena's Two Bodies: Gender and Whiteness in Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*," *Studies in the Novel* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 38–54; 45 and 53n; and Kerstin Rudolph, "A Woman of One's Own Blood: John Walden and the Making of White Masculinity in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*," *American Literary Realism* 46, no.1 (Fall 2013): 27–46; 28–29.

44. Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15.

45. From "Short Stories," an undated pamphlet distributed by the editorial rooms of *The Youth's Companion*, one of two different pamphlets sent to Chesnutt as enclosures by the magazine between

1899 and 1900 (Charles W. Chesnutt Papers, Fisk University).

46. For the passages from the 1899 (typescript) version, see Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past," in *Short Fiction*, 298, 293. Neither story's chronology is precise, but a deliberate shift beyond the historical allusions is clearly present in the revised statements by shoemaker Jim Prout about how many years after the Civil War Hank was a boy in butcher Gormully's employ (right after the war vs. twenty years after the war) and revised references to how much time has passed since Hank left Greenville (variably eighteen to twenty years before the narrative begins in the 1893 version, but thirteen to fifteen years in 1899).

47. Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15. The nomination of the World's Columbian Exhibition commissioners (at the state and national level) began in 1889, so this does not necessarily violate with the story's chronological setting "in the spring of 188-."

48. It is not clear whether Chesnutt and his wife timed their visit to coincide with Douglass's attendance for Colored People's Day on 25 August 1893, since Helen Chesnutt only mentions that they went that summer (*Pioneer*, 65). Ida B. Wells, *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (n. p., 1893), includes an introduction by Frederick Douglass and one chapter by F. L. Barnett that specifically addresses the exposition. While all commissioners were white, under pressure from a delegation of activists, President Harrison named a Black high school principal as an alternate commissioner, an appointment "viewed as tokenism"; see Anna R. Paddon and Sally Turner, "African Americans and the World's Columbian Exposition," *Illinois Historical Journal* 88, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 19–36; 27.

49. Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past" (based on typescript version), in *Short Fiction*, 300.

50. Frank N. Schubert, *Black Valor: Buffalo Soldiers and the Medal of Honor, 1870–1898* (Scholarly Resources, 1997), xi, 110.

51. For the discovery of Chesnutt's recommendation for the cadetship at the US Naval Academy, see Tess Chakkalakal, *A Matter of Complexion: The Life and Fictions of Charles Waddell Chesnutt* (St. Martin's Press, 2025), 30–31; and her earlier "Charles Chesnutt and the Reconstruction of Black Education," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American Civil War and Reconstruction*, ed. Kathleen Diffley and Coleman Hutchison (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 243–55. In February 1882, at the end of his last journal, Chesnutt wrote a bitter satirical poem that references his agemates Johnson Chesnut Whittaker (1858–1931) and Henry Ossian Flipper (1856–1940), two Black West Point cadets who were badly mistreated (see Brodhead, *Journals*, 175–76). For Chesnutt's direct references to the Spanish-American War, see Chesnutt, "Rights and Duties," a speech to the Bethel Literary and Historical Association, Washington, DC, delivered on 6 October 1908 (in *Essays and Speeches*, 252–62, 257–58 and 262n5); and his brief praise of the valor of the Buffalo Soldiers at the Battle of the San Juan Heights in his speech to Cleveland soldiers about to be deployed in World War I in the fall of 1917 (Chesnutt, "Address to Colored Soldiers at Grays Armory," in *Essays and Speeches*, 449–58, 453, 457n18). On Charles Young deserving to become a general, see Chesnutt, "Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass," in *Essays and* Speeches, 507, 509n17.

52. Chesnutt, "Shadow of My Past" (based on typescript version), in *Short Fiction*, 302.

53. "Give a dog an ill name and hang him" as an English proverb to express the dire consequences of a bad reputation is documented since the early eighteenth century; see *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, 3rd ed., rev. F. P. Wilson (Clarendon Press, 1970), 302. Chesnutt, a lifelong Dickens reader, used the variant ("bad name," not "ill name") that might allude to the title of chapter 13 or Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, vol. 2 (Chapman and Hall, 1865), 111.

54. Howe to Chesnutt, 21 December 1899 (Charles W. Chesnutt Papers, Fisk University).

55. For an overview of the textual questions regarding *The House Behind the Cedars*, see Stephanie P. Browner and Kenneth M. Price, "Charles Chesnutt and the Case for Hybrid Editing," *International Journal of Digital Humanities* 1 (3 May 2019): 165–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/s42803-019-00015-7. For the emergence of the John Walden plot between 1895 and 1899, see Robert P. Sedlack, "The Evolution of Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*," *CLA Journal* 19, no. 2 (December 1975): 125–35; 127, 130.

56. Two unusually specific references to locations in downtown Fayetteville—Eccles Mill Pond and Gillespie Street—included in the 1893 version of "The Shadow of My Past" make clear that Chesnutt already had Patesville in mind when he was sketching Hank's otherwise generic Greenville, providing a further link to *The House Behind the Cedars*, which begins with a walk through postbellum Fayetteville.