



The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line, and Selected Essays

Charles W. Chesnutt

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Charles Waddell Chesnutt (1858-1932)—African-American educator, lawyer, and activist—was the most prominent black prose author of his day. In both his fiction and his essays, he addressed the thorny issues of the "color line" and racism in an outspoken way. Despite the critical acclaim resulting from several works of fiction and non-fiction published between 1898 and 1905, he was unable to make a living as an author. He kept writing, however, and several works which were not published during his lifetime have been rediscovered (and published) in recent years. He was awarded the Springarn Medal for distinguished literary achievement by the NAACP in 1928. The library at Fayetteville State University, in North Carolina, is named after him. *The Wife of His Youth* (1899) was Chesnutt's second collection of short stories, drawing upon his mixed race heritage. These deal largely with race relations, the far-reaching effects of Jim Crow laws, and color prejudice among African Americans toward darker-skinned blacks. Eric J. Sundquist wrote: "Chesnutt's color-line stories, like his conjure tales, are at their best haunting, psychologically and philosophically astute studies of the nation's betrayal of the promise of racial equality and its descent into a brutal world of segregation. He made the family a means of delineating America's racial crisis, during slavery and afterward." I have added three of Chesnutt's essays on the "color line" in an Appendix to this collection.

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