Fathers, Preachers, Rebels, Men

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Charles W. Chesnutt, Harper's Weekly, and Racial Caricature in Postbellum, Pre-Harlem America

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All over the United States the Associated Press had flashed the report of another dastardly outrage by a burly black brute,—all black brutes it seems are burly,—and of the impending lynching with its prospective horrors. This news, being highly sensational in its character, had been displayed in large black type on the front pages of the daily papers.

—Charles W. Chesnutt, The Marrow of Tradition

The above epigraph, a provocative passage from Charles W. Chesnutt's novel The Marrow of Tradition (1901), sardonically lances the popular expectation of the "burly black brute" even as it demonstrates how racist visions appear in the "large black type" of print journalism, thus staging the complementary nature not only of history and fiction, but also of visual image and printed text in producing black masculinity in the national imagination. Chesnutt's 1901 novel joins the irony and use of dialect from his tragicomic post-plantation tales of the previous fifteen years with the sentimentality of his passing narrative The House Behind the Cedars (1900) in a sensationalist plot, which culminates in a fictionalization of the 1898 Wilmington massacre as white rioters killed many African American citizens and overthrew the elected Republican government in North Carolina's then-largest city. His anger at the event,
related to the novelist by many of his friends and family who had seen it firsthand, exacerbated his longstanding frustration with post-plantation fiction and led him to reconfigure in his fiction widely understood racial caricatures of black men.

In *The Marrow of Tradition*, he recasts the threatening “buck” figure and the submissive servant as, respectively, heroic and a white construction. These literary depictions contrast with the illustrations of *Harper’s Weekly*’s Thomas Nast and lesser-known artists such as Sol Eytinge Jr. and S. G. McCutcheon, wherein African American men often appeared as simple, submissive, even childlike, whether in that magazine or the others published during and after Reconstruction, some of them the very periodicals in which much of Chesnutt’s short fiction initially appeared. This essay demonstrates how the illustrations of the nationally popular, middle-class *Harper’s Weekly* helped naturalize and promulgate stereotypical images of black men in the decade following Reconstruction, the very caricatures Chesnutt contestant through adapting and transforming them.

Catalogs and critiques of the stereotypes common to what Chesnutt called the “Post-Bellum–Pre-Harlem” era are not new. As Thomas L. Morgan points out, “In late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fiction, the majority of African American images in popular fiction were confined to Southern-based pastoral depictions that restricted black identity to stereotypically limited and historically regressive ideas.” Most often, the masculine types fell into a number of discreet categories: the physically formidable and dangerous “brute” alluded to in the passage of *The Marrow of Tradition*, a figure reminiscent of Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, or more fictional but equally fearsome (to some white audiences) insurrectionary figures; the at some times “comic” and at others violent and “debased” but always obeisant Sambo; the sullen Jack, suspended between the polarized versions of rebel and servant; the character of minstrelsy, the singing and dancing entertainer Jim Crow; the elderly uncles Remus and Rastus, the post-plantation storyteller and the often dimwitted but harmless elderly black man, respectively, appearing in Joel Chandler Harris’s fiction and elsewhere; and most famously, Uncle Tom, the self-sacrificing and loyal servant of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel.

The enduring power and historical overwriting enacted by racist stereotypes are perhaps best evidenced in Uncle Tom. Stowe’s character became the caricature of the subservient older black man, yet the historical figure of Josiah Henson, widely believed to be the basis for Stowe’s
literary type, presents a model of heroic resistance, not acquiescence. The April 21, 1877, issue of *Harper’s Weekly* lionizes Henson in terms more reminiscent of Frederick Douglass’s courage than Stowe’s sacrificial lamb, and paired engravings made from photographs of Henson and Douglass are joined by brief biographies. The biographical sketch of the former celebrates his leading his family to freedom and thereafter his “noble service of liberty and humanity” in aiding the escape of others. However, through the decade following Reconstruction, such distinguished illustrations appeared far less frequently in *Harper’s Weekly* than the more negative images of black masculinity from the very same issue, including the cover, one of Nast’s ambiguous portrayals of a grinning servant, and a cartoon in the final pages lampooning a clownish beggar.  

These illustrations of racial caricature dominated popular periodicals of the nineteenth century’s closing decades, the period that paradoxically saw the emergence of American literary realism, a movement concomitant with but not definitive of Chesnutt’s writing. Of realism and caricature, Henry B. Wonham argues, “These two aesthetic programs, one committed to representation of the fully humanized individual, the other invested in broad ethnic abstractions, operate less as antithetical choices than as complementary impulses.” Caricatures became loci of cultural consensus regarding ethnic, racial, and gendered types that served as starting points for particular characterizations. Especially for African American writers, working within these expectations could prove extremely limiting, and Morgan points out, “Once these types of characters had been established in the public’s mind, they became a part of the formulaic structure through which realism’s mimetic efficacy was measured. Fiction that did not replicate acceptable literary types was dismissed for its lack of fidelity to the established codes of ethnic description.” What constituted realistic fiction thus meant descriptions of people, settings, and events that matched the expectations of the reading public, which generally meant the white literate middle class—who, especially after Reconstruction, became accustomed to stories of African Americans set in the antebellum South that often romanticized plantation life and race relations. Chesnutt engaged this readership in his early sketches and short stories, which Wonham suggests employ “the thick brush of ethnic caricature” not to reify racist expectation “but to explore the psychological consequences of stigmatization upon human beings of every racial variety.” According to Wonham, it was in *Puck*, the weekly magazine that published nine of Chesnutt’s early short works from 1887 to 1891, in
which the author learned “to challenge the dehumanizing force of ethnic caricature in his own writing by inhabiting, rather than resisting, the forms that threatened to limit his aspirations.” In Wonham’s reading, Chesnutt dwelt within the outline of black caricature rather than trying to redraw its shape.

However, *Puck* was a little lower brow than the more widely distributed *Harper’s Weekly*, and the Chesnutt of the 1880s certainly aspired, most famously, “to be an author,” and to the wealth, prestige, and class advancement he hoped that would bring. Wonham reads Chesnutt’s sketches in *Puck* in relation to the caricatures of that magazine’s pages, but while that magazine’s subtitle—“What Fools These Mortals Be!”—may have appealed to the writer’s sardonic edge, the tagline of *Harper’s Weekly* declared it “A Journal of Civilization,” and its illustrations celebrating Republican ideals, domestic prosperity, and “genteel” manners certainly depicted a world Chesnutt sought to join. Those illustrations played a significant role in the magazine’s success, as it outstripped its closest competitor *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* after the end of the Civil War. The editor of *Frank Leslie’s* in 1875 acknowledged that in comparison with his publication’s emphasis on current, transitory events, *Harper’s Weekly*’s illustrations offered “pictures of sentiment” that “last in the mind of the purchaser.” Images depicting the inequities of class and racial difference may well have lasted in the mind of Chesnutt, who had access to such magazines and read thoroughly in the 1870s and 1880s and onward in his effort to improve himself and better his circumstances in becoming an author.

Born in 1858 in Cleveland to African American parents, Chesnutt’s racial lineage was sufficiently mixed that he easily could have passed, a characteristic shared by several of the protagonists of his novels. However, unlike those characters, the writer consistently described himself as mixed race, both as he grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and in his later return to Cleveland. Chesnutt’s literary career provides a valuable barometer of the possibilities and limits of life on the color line in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; he grew up in the rural South and lived later in the urban North, spatial borderlands counterpart to the divisions of the period Chesnutt described as “post-bellum, pre-Harlem” also understood as the nadir of African American experience. As a light-skinned man designated as black both by the one drop rule and by his own choice, the writer negotiated widespread stereotypes of black masculinity as he sought to establish a public voice, even as he left
a record of private frustration with both the Southern African American community and the Northern literary establishment. Racial essentialism trumping class advancement proved vexing for Chesnutt during much of his professional life and connected to his unease regarding his racial identity and his dissatisfaction with dialect stories.

Early on, Chesnutt demonstrated his profound ambivalence regarding his understanding of himself vis-à-vis the larger category of African Americans. In a journal entry from 1875, when he was seventeen, he expresses frustration with his African American students, condemning them as “good-sized liars, hypocrites, inquisitive little nigger wenches.”\textsuperscript{13} Dean McWilliams comments that “the imperfectly erased epithet enacts, in capsule form, the problem with which Chesnutt struggled throughout his early journals, and indeed, throughout his literary career.”\textsuperscript{14} Also in 1875, Chesnutt remarks of his African American neighbors, “Uneducated people, are the most bigoted, superstitious, hardest headed people in the world!”\textsuperscript{15} In an 1879 letter sent to the \textit{Christian Union}, though not printed there, he refers to “the colored people” and their “political rights”: “In most parts of the state they have a fair proportion of jurors.”\textsuperscript{16} Chesnutt felt divided in his willingness to throw his lot in with a social body he often felt more apart from than a part of, particularly in terms of the education and class mobility for which he worked much of his life. Nevertheless, as the third-person plural \textit{they} is struck through and replaced by \textit{we}, he acknowledged in this early stage of his development as a writer, however grudgingly, his membership in a racial community.

That shaped the topic of his writing early on, especially as he took note of the success of writers such as Albion Tourgée, author of the popular \textit{A Fool’s Errand, by One of the Fools} (1879), a white Northerner’s account of the Reconstruction South. Chesnutt sought to follow such work and move beyond it, declaring in an 1880 journal entry, “I shall not record stale negro minstrel jokes, or worn out newspaper squibs on the ‘man and brother.’”\textsuperscript{17} To Chesnutt, the minstrelsy humor so common to the pages of \textit{Harper’s Weekly} cartoons would certainly be “stale,” but they must not have seemed so to the magazine’s editors and their anticipation of their readers’ desires. In like fashion, the author found the well-known 1787 Quaker medallion depicted a kneeling manacled bondsman declaring, “Am I not a Man and a Brother” to be “worn out,” but the slogan is referenced in two 1879 \textit{Harper’s Weekly} covers illustrated by Nast, one featuring a craven Sambo figure.\textsuperscript{18} To readers of \textit{Harper’s Weekly} in the 1870s and 1880s, the very reading public Chesnutt sought to engage, antebellum tropes of blackness remained well-trod terrain.
Illustrations of Black Masculine Stereotypes in Harper’s Weekly

We have no way to know if Chesnutt read Harper’s Weekly, though it was the nation’s most popular news and literary magazine, with an effective circulation of a half million people, so he would certainly have been aware of it, especially as he undertook a rigorous reading schedule in an ambitious plan of self-education. We know he was familiar with the weekly’s sister publication, as in an 1880 journal entry, he described a local bookseller recounting “a paragraph in Harper’s [Monthly] Magazine,” though the episode in question is not a paragraph from an article but part of the caption of a three-panel illustration—so easily do image and text confound. The readers of Harper’s were the very audience he sought to engage in his fiction, and Chesnutt recounts his plan of reading and describes his motives to head North for a literary career, writing, “I pine for civilization and ‘equality.’” Harper’s Weekly promised the former, and while its articles made some effort to promote the latter, the frequent illustrations tell a different tale. The nation’s most popular weekly provides an illustrative record of imaginations of black men broadly held by the white middle class, the very readership Chesnutt sought to cultivate. Even as that “journal of civilization” often declared in print its commitment to racial justice, its illustrations more generally capitulated to racist stereotypes of black men.

Two images appeared on facing pages in the August 23, 1879, issue of Harper’s Weekly in a fashion that starkly dramatizes the polarized and competing versions of black masculinity (see figure 7). On the left-facing page, a detailed, stand-alone engraving featured a baby-faced black man with a watermelon under each arm and one balanced on his head, smiling and looking at the reader, followed by a young boy, perhaps his son, struggling with another melon. They are leaving a field, and a crescent moon indicates night, perhaps implying that their harvest is theft. The caption reads, “Water-Millions Is Ripe” and identifies the artist as Sol Eytinge, a frequent contributor to the weekly magazine and illustrator for editions of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Dickens, and Alfred Tennyson. The right-facing detailed engraving matched its opposite in size, occupying three-quarters of the page, and depicted “A Zulu Scout” peering from brush, his eyes wide and expression serious. He holds a carbine in hand, bears a shield and bandolier of cartridges, wears prominent earrings, and is shirtless. The accompanying article, “The Vanquished Zulus,” like most in the magazine, was unattributed and begins beneath
Figure 7 “Water-Millions Is Ripe” and “A Zulu Scout.” Two versions of black masculinity: these facing pages of the August 23, 1879, issue of Harper’s Weekly indicate the polarized and competing Sambo and Nat stereotypes.
the unrelated illustration to finish on the next beneath the second image, chronicling “another one of England’s long successions of little wars” in the defeat of the Zulu nation, leaving power with the English. Literally underwritten by a justification of African colonization, the two images illustrate the opposite poles that dovetail precisely with the Sambo and Nat stereotypes prevalent since the antebellum era: one version is childlike, simple, nonthreatening, and happy in a rural setting of likely poverty; the other is adult, serious, armed, and potentially violent. While we cannot know what editorial process led to the commissioning of these two images and their adjacent publication, their side-by-side appearance invites at least one simple interpretation: African men could be warriors, but Harper’s Weekly preferred its black men at home to present less potent forms of masculinity.

In the decade immediately following Reconstruction and the period of Chesnutt’s decision to become an author, Harper’s Weekly kept the eye of the nation turned southward. A lead article in 1877 on “The Southern Question” began, “As slavery was the commanding question of our politics for a generation before the war, so the ‘Southern question’ which grows out of Reconstruction will long be the most important of all our political problems. The first step in its wise and peaceful solution is knowledge of the situation.” The magazine sought to increase the nation’s understanding of race relations in the South, and 1880 alone saw Harper’s Weekly publish one of Sherwood Bonner’s dialect tales, over thirty illustrations of African Americans, and a four-part series of two-page articles focusing on black rural life in Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama. For three of those four Southern articles, one-third of the space of each first page was dedicated to illustrations—for the fourth, over half of the column inches were images (over half of each second page is advertisements). That relative proportion of text and image actually underestimates the degree to which Harper’s Weekly relied on increasingly inexpensive engraving reproduction in the 1870s and 1880s, as publishers found frequent illustrations a powerful selling point, and between 1877 and 1887, eight to eleven of the typically twenty pages of each issue were entirely or predominantly images, while generally six pages included only text, with the remainder a balance of images, articles, and advertisements. In terms of column inches, the magazine offered more image than text. Visuals varied among minimal sketches, cartoonish caricatures, extremely detailed figures with exaggerated features, photorealistic engravings often copied from photographs or paintings, and reproductions of photographs.
The variations of black masculinity in these engravings of 1877 to 1887 balanced among clinging to antebellum stereotypes, offering mostly accurate but limited and limiting accounts of rural poverty and satirizing the efforts of African Americans to enter the middle and upper classes. While Nast sometimes portrayed black men in the South as a voting bloc in a tug-of-war between Republicans and Democrats, more common were depictions of black men as variously lazy, lying, happy and smiling, petty thieves, and nostalgic for “old massah.” The last of these fostered romanticized versions of slavery and subordinated African American men to the paternalism of white mastery. These pages depicted black men almost uniformly as rural and poor; occasional middle-class depictions, often in Sol Eytinge’s Blackville series, generally lampooned aspirations of social mobility. Almost exclusively, African American speech was offered as dialect in phonetic spelling, as a rule for comic effect and with pronunciations that likely reflect linguistic minstrelsy rather than any authentic dialect, and, with the exception of Douglass, only black men in Africa were offered as warriors and leaders. Such depictions tightly bound meanings of class and gender with race. That is, the professional occupations most available to black men in the mid- to late nineteenth century were the ministry and education. Preaching, teaching, and the educational preparation increasingly undergirding each in their professionalization made knowledge, proper dress, and speech the defining characteristics of middle- and upper-class manliness. Lampooning ignorance, nonstandard dialect, and foolishness not only generally denigrated blackness but specifically attacked black masculinity. Furthermore, given the associations of honor and truthfulness—a man’s word being his bond—portrayals of black men as lying implied their lack of honor and thus lack of manhood.

Criminality is among the most pernicious of the expectations fostered in the images. A drawing by C. M. Coolidge from the February, 9, 1878, issue offered a detailed caricature of a seemingly guileless young black man denying the apparently outrageous accusation from a white man that he has stolen chickens, only to be undone by the chicks peering out from his hat (see figure 8). The caption for this image reads, “Injured Innocence—[Drawn by C.M. Coolidge.] ‘I hain’t seen nuffin of yer Chickens! Do you took me for a Thief? Do you see any Chickens ’bout me? Go ’way dar, white man! Treat a boy ’spectable, if he am brack!’” His shirt and broad hat are in tatters and suggest a rural setting, and the dark skin, exaggerated lips, and dialect clearly mark his blackness. His eyes meet those of the Harper’s Weekly readers, and his address
Figure 8 Petty Thieves and Liars. The caption for "Injured Innocence" reads, "I hain’t seen nuffin of yer Chickens! Do you took me for a Thief? Do you see any Chickens 'bout me? Go 'way dar, white man! Treat a boy 'spectable, if he am brack!"
to the “white man” directly invokes the race, if not the gender, of many of those readers. The intended humor lies in the ironic distance between the evidence of the crime and the umbrage of his wounded pride at the accusation and demand to be treated “‘spectable.” Better concealed than the chicks in this scene was the potential violence an African American man could face in the South of 1878 for this mix of lie, theft, and perceived insolence.

A seemingly insatiable lust for chicken and watermelon harbored by black men appeared in numerous images of *Harper's Weekly* from 1877 to 1887. A May 4, 1878, cartoon featured a black man fleeing a farm at night, his arms full of stolen chickens, and the caption laments, “Oh, why does the white man follow my path?”

An August 4, 1883, detailed half-page caricature managed at once to depict black masculinity as lazy, impotent, and criminal, as a black man in the foreground holds a rifle but slouches in sleep, his foolish grin clueless as two black children steal watermelons behind him.

A full-page, detailed engraving and accompanying brief interpretive sketch from October 23, 1886, detailed the trial of “The Village Pest,” a general class of youth likely to make town “lively” through petty thievery. Though the drawing in question depicted an African American boy, the short article that served as an extended caption seems to pitch its defense of the boy in a light-hearted, ironic register, as “the abstracted fowls have no connection with the accused boy,” and his mother defends him. “There can be little doubt that the case will be dismissed.”

While the text indicates such a pest “is oftener white than black,” the image is part of a larger pattern for a different story.

Chesnutt addressed this appetite in both “A Virginia Chicken” (1887) and “A Victim of Heredity; or, Why the Darkey Loves Chicken” (1900). In the first, he overturns the stereotype by demonstrating how all hungry men appreciate roast chicken and in dire circumstances will steal to get it. In the second, the narrator and his wife are white upper-class sojourners in the South, and she declares, “There are thieves wherever there is portable property, and I don’t imagine colored people like chickens any better than any one else.” Chesnutt’s longstanding storyteller Julius corrects her and offers a tale explaining that overworking starving slaves led to a back-and-forth of conjuring between white and black, finally resulting in an exceptional hunger for chickens in the race.

Though humorous in tone, “A Victim of Heredity” in particular maintains the underlying tragedy that lays bare the relationships among poverty, race, crime, and punishment, as the narrator’s capture of a young
African American chicken thief encourages him to set an example, and “five years in the penitentiary would be about right”—a draconian sentence dodged when the narrator’s wife has Julius set the captive free after hearing the latter’s tale.32

Petty crime and its punishment provide the basis of an August 13, 1887, cartoon (see figure 9) appearing in Harper’s Weekly the same year as the publication of “A Virginia Chicken.” A magistrate addresses a shabbily dressed black man, telling the defendant, “It’s ten dollars or thirty days, Uncle Rastus. You can take your choice.” Rastus replies, “Well, yo’ kin gimme de money, sah,” a misunderstanding of the penalty of fine or incarceration, to which the bailiff responds with a look of shock.33 It is a sophisticated cartoon, a static image that, although static, not only depicts in its caption a brief passage of time—“after some contemplation”—but, read left to right, charts the question, the answer, and the bailiff’s response of surprise at the answer. This brief narrative time and space is itself bracketed by the presumed prior action of Rastus’s unnamed crime and the subsequent punishment, undoubtedly the jail sentence, given his implied economic position. Another layer of interpretation remains available as well. The judge holds his hands together in a fashion similar to Rastus’s gesture of contemplation: his right fingers under his chin, so that his hand mirrors that of the white judge. Moreover, Rastus’s very dark skin contrasts with his white lips, evoking the characterization of blackface. Illustrated in all likelihood by a white engraver for a primarily white middle-class readership, this drawing of the stereotypically named Uncle Rastus operates as a trope of minstrelsy, the popular racist white imaginations of black life that reached their height in the antebellum period but remained in some vogue through the 1870s and 1880s.34

The Rastus figure of the perpetually smiling, older black man as the butt of one joke or another was one of the most frequent figures in the relatively small cartoons (generally one-sixth of a page) independent of any article that appeared regularly in the penultimate page of Harper’s Weekly. The willingness to cast black people in general and men in particular as the object of humor reached such a height that 35 of the 157—almost one out of every four—issues of the magazine from 1885 to 1887 featured such depictions in those cartoons. These often crude caricatures characterized black men as careless, frightened, foolish, lazy, poor, and greedy, and what humor they intended often relies on the malapropisms and misunderstandings common to minstrelsy. In one panel, an Uncle Abra’m reads in a broadsheet that a black murderer has been executed and muses, “Why’d ’ey wait till de murderin’s all dun ’fo’ dey hang ’im?
Figure 9 Truth and Consequences. The caption for “His Choice” reads, “It’s ten dollars or thirty days, Uncle Rastus. You can take your choice.” “Well, yo’ kin gimme de money, sah.”
'Pears like 't 'ud be pow'ful sight better to hang de murd'rer b'fo' he kill sumbody.' The character's literacy and formal dress—he wears tails and a top hat, a common ironic counterpoint to minstrelsy's expectation of black inferiority—are undone by a fundamental lack of understanding regarding cause and effect. Also explicit in his brief speech is the recommendation to incarcerate black men before they commit crimes. Another cartoon also relied on fractured dialect and misunderstanding, an especially poignant episode suggestive of the legal inequities of the Jim Crow South. An Uncle Moses tells a younger man that he has been cleaning a lawyer's office for almost thirty years, and all the same books are still there. Though “ignunt people may think de law done change,” he says, “dem whar knows, knows better.” The speaker's misunderstanding of case law and the irony of his aspersion of “ignunt people” operated as one layer of potential comedy—though not for Chesnutt, who passed the bar exam in 1887, the year this cartoon was published. The fundamental failure of Southern law to change meaningfully in the Jim Crow era presents an underlying tragedy and another layer of meaning.

Most of these caricatures simulated African American dialect for intended comic effect, and a September 25, 1886, cartoon titled “Funatic Spelling” shows a middle-class black man wearing glasses and reading the newspaper, sitting next to a rural laborer (see figure 10). One asks the other a question, and though it is not explicit which speech belongs to either speaker, the implication seems to be that the gentleman reading the paper poses the question to the other, asking his opinion of “de projected refo’m in spellin’.” He explains, “in de place of spellin’ hoss h-o-r-s-e, in dat roun’bout way, yo’ jes cut it sho’t an’ spell it h-o-s, like it soun’s.” The other man responds in an almost bestial grunt, “Ugh—hugh—seems to me dat's sensable.” What pleasure white readers took in this exchange seems likely rooted in the speech common to these two men. One is clearly literate and, based on his fine clothing, of comfortable means and perhaps a professional or at least a well-heeled servant, while the other is likely a member of the uneducated, rural working class. Nevertheless, both speak in dialect because both are black.

Imitations of African American speech throughout Harper’s Weekly illustrations from 1877 to 1887 demonstrated the popularity of the black dialect, an esteem that frustrated Chesnutt. In an 1889 letter to Tourgée, Chesnutt wrote, “I think I have about used up the old Negro who serves as a mouthpiece [. . .] and I shall drop him in future stories, as well as much of the dialect.” However, the dialect stories sold, as indicated in Chesnutt’s many post-plantation stories published individually in various
Figure 10 Race, Class, and Dialect. The caption for “Fun-atic Spelling” reads, “Mistah Borey, what yo’ tink of de projected refo’m in spellin’ dat’s bein’ agitated?” “Doan b’lieve I jis un’erstan’ de nater on it.” “Waal, yo’ see, for instance, in de place of spellin’ hoss h-o-r-s-e, in dat roun’bout way, yo’ jes cut it sho’t an’ spell it h-o-s, like it soun’s, ‘liminatin’ all de silent soun’s.” “Ugh—hugh—seems to me dat’s sensable.”
magazines and in two 1899 collections, *The Conjure Woman* and *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line*, the latter of which includes four detailed illustrations.\(^{39}\) In a letter to *Atlantic Monthly* editor Walter Hines Page in 1898, Chesnutt lamented his fiction’s continued reliance on African American speech: “Speaking of dialect, it is almost a despairing task to write it. [ . . . ] The fact is, of course, that there is no such thing as a Negro dialect; that what we call by that name is the attempt to express, with such a degree of phonetic correctness as to suggest sound, English pronounced as an ignorant old Southern Negro would be supposed to speak it, and at the same time to preserve a sufficient approximation to the correct spelling to make it easy reading.”\(^{40}\)

Regardless of his dismissal, throughout the period of the publication of almost all of Chesnutt’s short stories, white impersonations of black dialect with dubious authenticity remained popular in captions for illustrations, as well as short fiction and published in the nation’s popular weekly. In 1883, *Harper’s Weekly* promoted its book publishing division’s release of a collection of its contributor Sherwood Bonner’s *Dialect Tales*, and the cover of that issue featured an illustrated dialect tale by Sophie Shepard. The 1885 article “The Creole Patois” celebrated “the slave poetry improvised according to African methods,” for which the white “imitations of the slave songs” are inferior in value.\(^{41}\) The promotion of Bonner’s book declared that literary portraiture of dialect “will vanish rapidly,” but that claim was belied by the magazine’s very effort to maintain such language and image, often through cartoons lampooning rural black men and women, particularly those of aspirant class.

These satires of efforts at class mobility would have been particularly painful for Chesnutt, given the degree to which he aspired to affluence and social rank. The “Blackville” series of typically full- but occasionally half-page detailed caricatures ran approximately thirty episodes in *Harper’s Weekly* from 1877 to 1884. Eytinge (and occasionally another illustrator) portrayed leisure, courtship, and family life in “Blackville,” parodying the efforts of African American families to imitate predominantly white middle- and upper-class cultural practices. These included conventional speech and spelling, and an African American debate society’s prominent sign “NO CONTEMPTIBIL LANWIGE ALLOWD” in an 1879 illustration unravels their effort at linguistic propriety. Another engraving that same year offered a black teacher’s criticism of his pupil: “Yer bin to dis Cadermy eighteen months, an’ dunno how to spell ‘pork?’ Yer nebriate, ye!”\(^{42}\) The fractured spelling and pronunciation of the debating society and teacher, like the formally dressed man of “Fun-
atic Spelling,” indicate that in white imaginations of blackness, even the professionals could not master the very basics of white communication and privilege. The presumption of white supremacy and black inferiority produced attempts at comedy that can appear quite horrifying. In an 1879 drawing attributed to Eytinge—though the engraving is signed “J. P. Davis Sen[ior]”—a white toddler in a dress aims a toy pistol at a shabbily attired smiling black child who clutches his head, while well-dressed parents and three boys also armed with toy guns admire the scene. The caption reads, “Fourth of July Morning—The First Shot.”

Celebrating Independence Day by playfully shooting a young black child offered a gloss of legitimacy to white-on-black violence that would increase during and after the 1880s, including the 1898 Wilmington massacre that provides the culminating episode in Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition.*

Perhaps some illustrators based their images on personal experience with African American communities, and their intent as well as the sensibility of the magazine publishing their work may have been lighthearted with no directed ill will. However, it seems more likely that, like the white portrayals of black behavior defining minstrelsy, the Blackville illustrations are products of racist white imagination unattached from observations of lived practice. After all, according to an 1883 profile in *Harper’s Weekly,* Eytinge, “whose Blackville sketches are among his most popular contributions to this journal,” lived in a “charming cottage adorned with profuse roses and climbing vines, affording from the piazza a superb view of New York.”

Lacking a view of the rural South, where did the artist find inspiration for his work? We can glean an indication in the November 1878 issues of the magazine. The caption for an 1878 Eytinge Blackville drawing reads, “Decorative art has at last reached Blackville—‘Dat small Japan mug cum from de ruins of Pompy.’” The scene’s realistic caricature demonstrates efforts of a black family to adopt the decorative arts and manners of white elites. Four weeks prior to Eytinge’s illustration, *Harper’s Weekly* featured an article with accompanying realistic illustrations depicting a decorative art exhibition in New York. Three weeks prior to the Blackville drawing, the magazine included the illustrated article “The Eruption of Vesuvius,” chronicling the burial of Pompeii and recent tourist visits to the site. A similar pattern occurred for other Blackville cartoons, and Eytinge’s “Great Blackville Regatta” and its dilapidated rowboats on the river appeared four weeks after an illustration and article on a Delaware yacht race. Given the recent publication of text and graphics on the decorative arts and the ruins of Pompeii, as well as the boating contest, the artist’s lampooning of African American
life and (failed) efforts at class mobility seem to employ as racial parody recent *Harper's Weekly* material chronicling upper-class leisure activities rather than any experience with rural African American life.

*Harper's Weekly* artists such as McCutcheon crafted realistic drawings relying less on the exaggerated traits and parodic settings, but that work—like Eytinge’s—dramatized the poverty of African Americans who puzzled over how to participate in American society. The same month as Eytinge fused articles on decorative arts and Pompeii into a parody of black life, McCutcheon offered a detailed realistic image with the caption “Old and Weary,” in which a well-dressed, elderly black man with white hair sits in the grass on the side of a wooded trail. Two young white girls eye him with curiosity or wariness as they walk past, and the poem indicated in the drawing’s caption appears two pages later, reading, “Weary thou art; the world seems sad and strange, / Thou aged wanderer in our alien land; / The problem lies beyond thy widest range; / Its simplest rule thou canst not understand.” The poem, likely an adaptation of Hebrews 11.8–9 account of Abraham from the King James Version of the Bible, casts the African American man as moving aimlessly in a land not his own, one with rules he “canst not understand.” Those rules, and another juxtaposition of black and white difference, were suggested in two illustrations from the 1881 New Year’s issue, which offered a pair of otherwise unrelated depictions of Christmas dinner. In one, several generations of a caricatured black family crowd around a dinner of possum in a small image dwarfed by an extremely dark-toned sketch of a nighttime swamp hunt. The illustration includes this dialect in scrawl, “POSSUM FAT and SIMMON BEER KRISMUS COME but UNCE A-YEAR.” A few pages later appeared the photo-realistic illustration of a well-dressed white family of four preparing for a dinner of roast pig. Economic security, linguistic mastery, class privilege, and lifelike representation were the domain of white, not black, Americans.

The images of African American families in *Harper’s Weekly* illustrations from 1877 to 1887 regularly depicted African American men (and less often, women) negatively: childlike, petty criminals and loafers, living in rural poverty, their speech an impoverished version of English, poorly imitating middle- and upper-class behavior, all for the intended amusement of white readers. Of course, the African American population of the United States immediately after Reconstruction was generally rural, often poor, and literacy varied. However, much of the magazine’s readership likely saw in the illustrations of well-to-do white men and women dining, traveling, or otherwise engaging in leisure less an accurate reflec-
tion of their present circumstances than a wishful mirror, a portrayal of themselves as rich, cultured, literate, and who they aspired to be. Black families were depicted as poor, coarse, and foolish—emphasizing what a racist white imagination believed them to be. The contrast is underscored by generally more realistic portrayals of white subjects in illustrations (aside from strictly political or comic works) and the more frequent caricatures of black subjects. Analysis of these illustrations does not dictate that *Harper’s Weekly* or its illustrators were entirely racist, that men and women of African descent did not imitate the cultural practices of (largely white) middle and upper classes in hopes of social mobility, or that such effort may have at times fallen short. However, it seems much more likely that white illustrators drew their imaginations of blackness in a fashion both capitulating to the expectations of their predominantly white audience and to foster Southern white readership. For a reader and writer like Chesnutt, such caricatures may have spurred him to envision alternative representations.

**Chesnutt’s Reconfiguration of Racial Caricatures**

Rather than the “stale” humor of minstrelsy or “worn out” appeals to antebellum tropes, the Chesnutt of 1880 dedicated himself to “come down to hard facts” in recording the “peculiar” and “interesting” aspects of black life in description and dialogue—but he faced a challenge in the popularity of plantation tales such as those by Harris and Bonner and the widespread practice of illustrations caricaturing black men as lazy, foolish, criminal liars incapable of proper speech or right action. Chesnutt’s published literary work of the 1880s and 1890s challenged those stereotypes with the romantic trickster and tragic figures of his dialect tales published in *Puck*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and many other magazines and newspapers, many of which were included in two 1899 collections.

Chesnutt’s post-plantation fiction already distanced itself from his predecessors and contemporaries, in part through characterizing the stereotypes of black masculinity as racist imaginations even more clearly than the appetite for chicken overturned in two of his stories. His only use of the term “Sambo” in the short stories is applied to a man who is actually white, but undertakes an unwilling minstrelsy. In “Mars Jeems’s Nightmare” from *The Conjure Woman*, the slave owner is conjured to appear as a black man, and overseer Mars Johnson asks “dat noo nigger,” “W’at ’s yo’ name, Sambo?” to which the new man replies, “My name
ain’ Sambo.” The insolence in refusing to identify with a stereotype spurs the overseer to whip him, to which he responds by attempting to attack the offender, though he is wrestled to the ground (and likely saved from being burned to death) by the other slaves. When that conjuring abates, the again white Mars Jeems resolves to treat his slaves better, though not to free them. In the story “The Passing of Grandison,” first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1887 and reprinted in *The Wife of His Youth*, the titular character’s passing does not refer to the attempt to appear white, but both his masquerade as a willing, subservient slave and his passages south and then north. A Kentucky plantation scion forcibly frees the seemingly meek slave Grandison to impress a woman, only to see the prodigal return from Canada by foot, an affirmation of fictive slave loyalty undone when Grandison escapes for good with his wife and kin. The apparent unwillingness to escape and the return were thus acts of black minstrelsy, a mask of servility given to him by the white patriarch and worn as a tool to accomplish the freedom of his family.

Chesnutt’s relative success with post-plantation fiction led him to suspend his stenography business and dedicate himself as a fulltime novelist, an experiment that lasted only briefly. Perhaps his strongest encouragement to do so came from a May 1900 review, an endorsement by critic and author William Dean Howells, arguably the nation’s foremost man of letters, who volunteered an essay to the *Atlantic Monthly* in which he described Chesnutt’s stories to date: “They are new and fresh and strong as life always is and fable never is,” and they feature “[c]haracter, the most precious thing in fiction,” which Howells described “as faithfully portrayed.” Howells contrasted Chesnutt’s stories with more familiar representations of blackness, “the grotesque and comical negro and the terrible and tragic negro.” This former editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and later columnist for *Harper’s Weekly* suggested that Chesnutt’s stories operate in the register of realism, his watchword for turn-of-the-twentieth-century literary merit. Their relationship would quickly sour with the 1901 publication of *The Marrow Tradition*, which Howells described as “bitter, bitter,” likely in part because its depictions of character, “the most precious thing in fiction,” departed from what the eminent critic felt were true to life. However, Howells held expectations of racial identity described by one critic as “minstrel realism,” a sensibility matching many of the detailed illustrations of *Harper’s Weekly*, and thus “faithfully portrayed” African American men and women may have meant to Howells portrayals faithful to antebellum stereotypes sustained during and after Reconstruction.
The two novels published at this zenith of Chesnutt’s literary trajectory coincided with what is commonly referred to as the nadir of post-bellum African American history, and of *The House behind the Cedars* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, the latter far more emphasizes and reconfigures the racial caricatures so prevalent in *Harper’s Weekly* as Chesnutt began his literary career. Chesnutt’s first published novel offers a sentimental narrative of passing that ends in the death of its heroine, Rena, one example of Howells’s “tragic negro” (in this case, mulatto), who is spurned by her white lover when he learns of her background and pursued unto death by an unscrupulous black suitor. Between these two thwarted relationships is another, her friendship with the devoted Frank Fowler, a black man, who seeks throughout the novel to love and protect Rena. A number of critics dismiss Frank as a negative stereotype, “displaying a doglike fidelity to Rena that results in more than one scene of self-debasement, [who] reinforces the image of the docile, servile black.”

We might ask, is Frank’s loyalty to love really so terrible? Rena’s devotion to George Tryon and her mother’s fierce and lasting love for her children are presented as feminine virtues, so sentimental attachment as “servile” presents a flaw only for black men, making the claim to Frank’s failure not one of race but masculinity.

If the dark-skinned and loyal Frank represents one type of black masculinity, Chesnutt increased the diversity of such representations in *The Marrow of Tradition*, even as he both exposed the degree to which caricature as a foundation of character is not restricted to African Americans and overturned the racial calculus of those types. The novel’s complex plot charts the entwined genealogies of the Carteret and Miller families, united through a common patriarch’s second and secret marriage to a black woman. Hidden wills, withheld inheritance, and denied legitimacy offer the backstory to the plot that begins with the birth of the new Carteret heir, a domestic scene paired with that of the unacknowledged black sister, her husband, Dr. Miller, and their young son. The elder Carteret schemes with Captain McBane and General Belmont to disenfranchise black citizens of the town and reassert white supremacy. Meanwhile, two young men, the decadent plantation son Tom Delamere and the reformist-minded Ellis, compete for the niece of the Carterets. On the other side of the color line, Dr. Miller encounters Josh Green, a black man who seeks vengeance on McBane for the death of his father and madness of his mother. Tom masquerades as a black Delamere servant, on whom he blames his robbery and murder of a widow, and Carteret, McBane, and Belmont precipitate a race riot, during which Josh
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kills McBane and is immediately slain. The massacre claims the Millers’
son, and the distraught parents must then face the Cartererets’ impossible
request in the final pages for Dr. Miller to apply his medical skills to save
their child. The sentimentalism of the near-gothic racial and monetary
patrimony runs parallel with the sensationalism of the plotting of the
race riot and its conclusion, twin tracks that mirror those of the train
that brings Dr. Miller back to the South again from Philadelphia to face
a tragic conclusion.

The four central black male characters span a range of deliberate
and recognizable types extending beyond the impoverished descrip-
tions of Harper's Weekly illustrations. There is the obedient porter Jerry,
who fawns over the white patriarchs at the Morning Chronicle; the faith-
ful Sandy, accused of murder after he is impersonated by a cheat, thief,
and murderer, the younger Delamere; Dr. Miller, the well-educated pro-
fessional, husband, and father, a stand-in for Chesnutt himself; and Josh
Green, the tough laborer who chooses brief, fierce liberty and death
rather than subservience to the white mob. Jerry and Sandy are servants,
Green is rural, and all three employ variations of dialect, but Dr. Mill-
er's profession and speech differ sharply with broadly held expectations
of black masculinity. All four initially appear as self-conscious types: the
Southern aristocrat Carteret describes Jerry as “a black negro, of the pure
type,” while Sandy, according to the narrator, “would have presented, to
one unfamiliar with the negro type, an amusingly impressive appear-
ance.” These types bear some resemblance to the brutal stigma of point-
edly racist stereotypes such as Sambo, though as in its single ironic use
in Chesnutt’s post-plantation fiction, the only mention of Sambo in the
1901 novel occurs in the pages of the Morning Chronicle, the newspa-
per voice of white supremacist Southern Democrats.55 The invocation of
racial types suggests instead the impulse of caricature Wonham describes
as coterminous with literary realism.

Introducing these men as types presents a starting point for their
characterizations, but Chesnutt does not reserve the technique exclu-
sively for black characters. In their own introductions, Dr. Miller and
Dr. Burns, black and white, each “represented very different and yet
very similar types of manhood,” with Burns “representing a fine type
of Anglo-Saxon”—which Chesnutt puns for comic effect when Jerry
pronounces his alliance with the “Angry Saxon race.” Also, “Sandy, no
less than his master [the elder Delamere], was a survival of an inter-
esting type.”56 As Wonham demonstrates of Chesnutt’s early stories and
those of his contemporaries, the shorthand caricature of types provided a
starting point for representations; however, *The Marrow of Tradition* pushes far beyond his earlier literary work to demonstrate the inadequacy of those types and reverses Wonham’s description of the magazine sketches, not inhabiting but resisting expectations.

Indeed, Howells’s account of the book as “bitter, bitter” likely results from the inversion of white and black stereotypes, a reversal that occurs on the axis of gender. *Harper’s Weekly* cartoons in the decade after Reconstruction regularly characterized black men as liars, thieves, and criminals, but it is white men (and to a lesser extent, women) in the novel who lie to themselves and others, steal, plot, and murder. Carteret, McBane, and Belmont, particularly with their claims to military rank, embody in their aggregate the caricature of Nathan Bedford Forrest that Nast excoriated regularly in *Harper’s Weekly* as personifying Southern masculine racial hatred and violence, and it is they who incite the mob in the fictionalization of the 1898 Wilmington massacre. Though differences of class seem to divide the three elder men, McBane’s coarse arguments for racial genocide, as the more aristocratic Carteret admits, “in their last analysis, were much the same as his, though he would have expressed them less brutally.”

Rapacious violence is a characteristic of white, not black, masculinity, and transcends class difference.

The logical heir to Carteret, McBane, and Belmont is the dissipated young Southern gentleman Tom Delamere, who similarly embodies the lying, stealing criminality popular white imagination attributed to black masculinity in *Harper’s Weekly* and elsewhere. Tom’s competing suitor Ellis describes him as “a type of the degenerate aristocrat,” and as the narrator offers in Tom’s introduction, “no discriminating observer would have characterized his beauty as manly. It conveyed no impression of strength, but did possess a certain element, feline rather than feminine, which subtly negatived the idea of manliness.”

In denigrating Tom’s lack of strength and other weaknesses, Chesnutt takes care not to equate his lack of masculinity with femininity but instead describes it as a bestial characteristic, itself a rhetorical reversal of the racist claims of African Americans as animals. The minstrelsy of Tom Delamere, whose “skill as a mimic and a negro impersonator was well known” even to his father, most fully demonstrates Chesnutt’s inversion of raced expectations of masculinity. The character’s impersonation of Sandy’s dialect and his own dancing delight visiting Northerners at a cakewalk, and while the observer Ellis does not see through the disguise, he does recognize the performance as “somewhat overdone, even for the comical type of negro.” Tom admonishes Sandy after the latter’s reputation has suffered due to Tom’s mas-
querade, “Brace up, Sandy, and be a man, or, if you can’t be a man, be as near a man as you can!” The cruelty in Tom calling to question the black man’s masculinity is undermined by the speaker’s own character, for the white man is a liar and murderous would-be trickster—in Chesnutt’s portrayal, less than a man, a “degenerate,” lacking strength, a “subtly negative” version of masculinity. The embodiment of violent criminality occurs in a white character whose blackface will falsely blame a black man, which implies instead that the “black brute” is a false construction of African American masculinity, a white invention.

Just as much a creation and inversion lies in the servitude of Jerry—whose last name, Letlow, a combination of allowance and negative perhaps provides an indication of how readers are to receive his character’s subservience. He provides the titular figure of the chapter titled “A White Man’s ‘Nigger,’” wherein the quotes, like the strikethrough of “nigger” in Chesnutt’s 1875 journal entry, set the final word apart, using the term while placing it at a distance. Where the earlier usage erases even as it writes the racist epithet, the 1901 chapter title ascribes to the “White Man” ownership not of the black man but, in the use of quotes, of the hateful language. Early in the novel Jerry declares that he “wush ter Gawd [he] wuz w’ite!” and in this chapter, he makes a point to read later a newspaper of the African American community, “an elegant specimen of journalism” Belmont scorns for, in addition to its critique of lynching and promotion of racial amalgamation, its advertisements for treatments to straighten hair and lighten black skin. Much later, Jerry will use the tonics and be ridiculed for it by Belmont, but his logic is simple: “he had realized that it was a distinct advantage to be white.”

The logic of white supremacy is predicated on the difference inscribed by the color line, but if Tom Delamere can cross it for his advantage, then Jerry will try as well. Of course, the narrator recognizes that like all the mortals of Puck’s tagline, “Jerry was a fool,” but “not all kinds of fool.” His condition as a fool in some sense but not all gains clarity in comparison with an earlier passage describing Dr. Miller’s journey southward on a segregated train car. Reconciling himself to this jim crow status requires that he recognize that “in order to live comfortably in the United States, he must be either a philosopher or a fool; and since he wished to be happy, and was not exactly a fool, he had cultivated a philosophy.” That philosophy, so bound in this instance to foolishness, seems to be the recognition of the false logic of racism coupled with an unwillingness to resist its strictures at personal cost. The subservience
attributed to black masculinity thereby proves at once the product of white imagination and a consequence, not a cause, of racism.

If recognizing the inequity of white supremacy but not overtly resisting it makes one a philosopher, fool, or both, then Josh Green is neither. His bodily strength and capacity for violence make him, along with Jerry, part of what Andrew Silver identifies as the competing “[c]omic and savage typologies of blackness.” However, to reduce the two characters to opposite poles of humorous harmlessness and potential violence reads them exclusively in terms of the facing pages of the 1879 Harper’s Weekly images of a comic smiling watermelon thief and a savage Zulu warrior. In Chesnutt’s much richer pages, those types are starting points for the demonstration that the comedy, criminality, and servility expected of black men are consequences of racism, as in the cases of Tom Delamere, Sandy, and Jerry. For Josh Green, who resembles the “burly black brute” so sensationalized in the “large black type” of contemporary periodicals, his threat of violence results from historical awareness and sense of justice.

When Dr. Miller treats the “black giant” Green for a broken arm, the doctor recognizes “how inseparably the present is woven with the past, how certainly the future will be but the outcome of the present.” Slavery and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan present “an old wound still bleeding,” and Dr. Miller feels some hope that African American men will become capable of sacrificing their lives “to defend a right.” In the conclusion to the racial massacre, it is Green rather than his professional counterpart who will repudiate white supremacy at the cost of his life. Anticipating the conclusion of the resistance and refusing to join or lead Green’s band, Dr. Miller feels at once “entirely convinced that he had acted wisely,” and “conscious of a distinct feeling of shame and envy that he, too, did not feel impelled to throw away his life.” Dr. Miller’s rational assessment and sentiment of shame complicate his character far beyond the existing caricatured types of black masculinity prevalent in the pages of Harper’s Weekly and, presumably, the minds of its readers.

If Tom Delamere “negatived the idea of manliness”—wherein negative is both the reversal of manliness and the inversion of color—then Dr. Miller and Josh Green offer a counterpoint of positive manliness. These two characters indicated as opposite in their class difference, respective dialects, and opposite ends remain inexorably paired in the novel: their shared train journey southward, Miller’s repair of Green’s injury and reflection on the presentness of history, Green’s assembly of resistance
and Miller’s refusal to join. Joseph R. McElrath Jr. joins other critics in declaring, “Unresolved as well is the question of exactly what Chesnutt was implying about different varieties of African Americans he pictures.” Part of what Chesnutt implies in the black men “he pictures” is that their diversity of character cannot be contained by the impoverished types prevalent in illustrations popular with many readers of the upscale weekly magazines—precisely the broad audience he longed for but failed to acquire and sustain in his time.

**Chesnutt’s Only** appearance in *Harper’s Weekly* occurred in 1905, after he had given up making a career as a full-time literary writer, and it was not one of his short stories or essays that appears, but a photograph of him at a table of eight, part of a gathering of nearly 150 people to celebrate the seventieth birthday of Mark Twain. Twain’s dialect story “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It” appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1874, twelve years prior to Chesnutt’s first publication there. Thirty-one years later and just months before the honoring of Twain, Chesnutt saw the release of his last novel published in his lifetime, *The Colonel’s Dream* (1905), which sold poorly and ended what hopes he still held for success as a novelist. The guests at the party included Twain, Howells, and Joseph Henry Harper of the Harper’s publishing empire, as well as Andrew Carnegie, Willa Cather, and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s son Julian. Chesnutt appeared in the photo somewhat in the background, seated at a table including seven other writers: May Isabel Fisk, a frequent contributor to *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*; John Kendrick Bangs, then editor of *Puck* magazine, which had published nine of Chesnutt’s early short works; naturalist Ernest Ingersoll, author of fourteen nonfiction books; Anna P. Paret of *Harper’s Bazaar*; Roy L. McCordell, early film scenarist and prolific magazine writer; John Luther Long, author of the short story “Madame Butterfly” (1898), the basis of the play and opera; and poet Caroline Duer. Here Chesnutt sat amidst the society he so aspired to join, and he likely felt a little of the ironic ambivalence so common to his narratives as he joined his esteemed company to honor a white Southern writer who earned his literary reputation and wealth in part through incorporating African American dialect and depicting black life.
Notes


4. While Douglass’s physical and moral courage perhaps need no reminder, we might usefully recall his description of “that slave who has the courage to stand up for himself against the overseer,” in My Bondage and My Freedom (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton, & Co., 1857), 95. Douglass’s portrait appeared on the cover of Harper’s Weekly in 1883; Harper’s Weekly, 24 November 1883, 773. One of Henson’s own autobiographies offers his account of a physical battle with an overseer in The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself (Boston, MA: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849), 15–17. The paired portraits and biographical sketches appear in Harper’s Weekly, 21 April 1877, 305–6; the cover (301) follows Nast’s consistent ambivalence regarding the citizenship and manliness of African American men.
documented by Fiona Halloran (chapter 5). The cartoon (316) offers a “Seedy Applicant” dressed in patchwork rags, offering a presumable lie regarding his economic status.


8. C. Vann Woodward in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) declares, “It was quite common in the ’eighties and ’nineties to find in the *Nation*, *Harper’s Weekly*, the *North American Review*, or the *Atlantic Monthly* Northern liberals and former abolitionists mouthing the shibboleths of white supremacy regarding the Negro’s innate inferiority” (70). See also *Myth and Southern History*, vol. 1: *The Old South* and vol. 2: *The New South*, both edited by Patrick Gerster and Nicholas Cords (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).


10. An issue of *The Nation* (31 August 1871) features an advertisement in which *Harper’s Weekly* boasts that its “circulation is four times that of any similar publication” (152). In a journal entry dated March 26, 1881, Chesnutt writes, “It is the dream of my life—to be an author! [. . .] It is not altogether the money. It is a mixture of motives. I want fame; I want money; I want to raise my children in a different rank of life”; *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, Richard Brodhead, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 154. For more on Chesnutt’s own account of his development as an author, see “To Be an Author”: *Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt 1889–1905*, Joseph R. McElrath Jr. and Robert C. Leitz, III, eds. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).


15. Chesnutt, Journals, 81.
17. Ibid, 126.
19. Chesnutt describes a dialogue with the vendor as follows: “Mr. Haigh read a paragraph in Harper’s Magazine, where a lady requests her servant Bridget in a mild and deprecating tone, to perform some slight service, ‘if it was not inconvenient.’ He adopts a highly ironic tone concerning ‘the inconveniences that the rich have to suffer, that the poor are not troubled with’ (126). Brodhead indicates that Haigh ‘was a man of conservative social and racial attitudes who gave Chesnutt a place to read and talk’ (126n61). The three-part illustration titled “Mistress and Maid” charts the reversals of authority between mistress and servant in 1780, 1880, and 1980; Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, April 1880, 800.
24. Wonham, Playing the Races, 16–17; Brown, Beyond the Lines, chapters 5 and 6.
25. Holidays in particular seemed to inspire such nostalgia. A photorealistic illustration for Thanksgiving depicts a smiling young black man with a turkey saying, “Thirty-two pounds, massa!” Harper’s Weekly, 19 November 1881, 777; a detailed illustration shows a black family presenting, according to the caption, “A Christmas Gift to Ole Master and Missus” in Harper’s Weekly, 22 December 1883, 820.

35. Harper’s Weekly, 19 February 1887, 139.
38. Chesnutt, “To Be an Author,” 44.
40. Chesnutt, “To Be an Author,” 105. Though Chesnutt challenges the legitimacy of the speech he used in his fiction, Lisa Cohen Minnick verifies the dialectical veracity of Chesnutt’s conjure tales, tracing speech patterns to that of North Carolina former slaves; Dialect and Dichotomy: Literary Representations of African American Speech (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).
48. Harper’s Weekly, 1 January 1881, 5, 12. In the first of the two images, the “N” of “SIMMON” is reversed.
59. Ibid., 16, 95.
60. Ibid., 118, 119, 122, 229. As Andrew Silver points out, given that the coat Tom has briefly stolen from Sandy was handed down to the servant from the elder Mr. Delamere, “when Delamere parodies Sandy, then, he also parodies his father”; *Minstrelsy and Murder: The Crisis of Southern Humor, 1835–1925* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 202n35.
63. Ibid., 60–61.
64. Silver, *Minstrelsy and Murder*, 167. However, Silver does not attend to the specifically gendered nature of those types in Chesnutt’s fiction.
66. Ibid., 285.
69. Ibid., 1914.