



Charles W. Chesnutt: Stories, Novels, and Essays (Library of America)

By Charles W. Chesnutt

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Rejecting his era's genteel hypocrisy about miscegenation, lynching, and "passing," **Charles W. Chesnutt** broke new ground in American literature with his innovative explorations of racial identity and use of African-American speech and folklore. Chesnutt exposed the deformed logic of the Jim Crow system—creating, in the process, the modern African-American novel. Here is the best of Chesnutt's fiction and nonfiction in the largest and most comprehensive edition ever published, featuring a newly researched chronology of the writer's life.

The Conjure Woman (1899) introduced Chesnutt to the public as a writer of "conjure" tales, stories that explore black folklore and supernaturalism. That same year, he published **The Wife of His Youth**, and **Other Stories of the Color Line**, stories set in Chesnutt's native North Carolina that dramatize the legacies of slavery and Reconstruction at the turn of the century. His first novel, **The House Behind the Cedars** (1900), is a study of racial passing. **The Marrow of Tradition** (1901), Chesnutt's masterpiece, is a powerful and bitter novel about the harsh reassertion of white dominance in a southern town at the end of the Reconstruction era.

Nine uncollected short stories round out the volume's fiction, including conjure tales omitted from **The Conjure Woman** and two stories that are unavailable in any other edition. Eight essays highlight his prescient views on the paradoxes of race relations in America and the definition of race itself.

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