

# **Reader's Report of Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)**

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**WILLIAM BELMONT PARKER**

PARK STREET

Aug 16, 1901

MS. No. 9134

Received: July 29, 1901

By American Ex.

Title: *The Marrow of Tradition*

Author: Charles W. Chesnutt

64 Brenton St.

Cleveland, O.

Author's Instructions: None

Receipt of MS. acknowledged: July 29, 1901

Submitted to: W.B.P.

Reported by reader: 31 July

Character: See attached report.

Recommendation: To publish

Report Approved July 31, 1901

Author advised GHM

MS. Sent to Printers 6 Aug. Pow Wow.  
(indecipherable signature)

(1)

In the "Marrow of Tradition" Mr Chesnutt has written a novel on the color line into which he has put unusual strength of feeling.

The scene is laid in Charleston SC though the city is not named and the time is ~~about~~ the past decade while the disfranchisement movement was going forward.

It is not a novel with a hero, but a novel of a group of people whose lives were interwoven.

The book begins with the birth of a child to Cartaret a member of one of the old families & editor of the leading paper.

The birth of his son increases Cartaret's desire for white supremacy and he enters into a conspiracy to bring it about.

This leads him at once into the muddle of prejudice between the two races and ~~leads~~ forces him to foster misunderstandings. There are a thousand occasions and ~~all~~ he turns all of them to account in his campaign for white supremacy which means negro disfranchisement.

2

To bring this about seems to require getting possession of the city government which is in ~~the~~ hands friendly to the negroes. A revolution is planned therefore: The white ~~po~~ men are organized, ~~presumably~~ ostensibly to forestall a negro uprising, and on a ~~given~~ day suddenly take possession of the streets, ~~order~~ search all negroes and order all the prominent among them to leave town; and kill all who resist.

This is the climax of the political movement of the novel. Along ~~th~~ with the political current has gone the current of individual fate. ~~Cartaret, like many other white men, was not wholly free of persuade~~

The real hero of the book is a ~~colored~~-negro doctor named Miller who was married to Cartaret's sister in law, the daughter by a negress of Mrs

Cartaret's father. This complication embitters many relations and is typical of the occasions for bad feeling between the races.

~~The doctor resists all efforts to drive him from the town.~~

2

Mrs Cartaret has, naturally, nothing but scorn for Mrs Miller – in spite of the fact that they had the same father and he had married the mother of his second child. But after the riot, when negroes were lying dead all about the city – and all was confusion Mrs Cartaret's child fell ill of croup. No doctor could be had. At last they appealed to Dr Miller. But his child had been killed by a chance bullet from a white man. He refused to go. Mrs Cartaret – in desperation – went to him. He still refused, pointing to his dead child. But softening promised to go if his wife asked it. So the two sisters met – the one appealing to the other she had despised and the doctor went to save the child.

A novel full of intensity, well though not brilliantly written and capable of wide popular success.

W.B.P.

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J.W. Warr  
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2

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