

APPENDIX M

**REMEMBERING 1898:
LITERARY RESPONSES AND PUBLIC MEMORY
OF THE WILMINGTON RACE RIOT**

Remembering 1898:
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by
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If the tables could once be turned, and it could be that it was the black race which violently and lastingly triumphed in the bloody revolution at Wilmington, North Carolina, a few years ago, what would not we excuse to the white man who made the atrocity the argument of his fiction?

William Dean Howells's

Review of Charles Chesnut's *The Marrow of Tradition*¹

Recent scholarship on memory has revealed the ways in which Southerners have selectively remembered and forgotten aspects of their past, constructing a narrative of events to suit the needs of the present. After the Wilmington Race Riot, victorious state Democrats crafted their own narrative about the election and the violence that ensued. The popular memory of the Wilmington Race Riot legitimized the rule of the Democratic Party and effectively denied African Americans access to economic and political opportunities. The genre of historical fiction proved to be the most popular means of challenging the public memory of the riot. In the years that followed the riot, two African American writers, David Bryant Fulton and Charles Waddell Chesnut, challenged the popular narrative of events, but they ultimately failed to capture a wide audience. The dominant memory of the event left little room for the black point of view. The popularity of Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900* (1902) illustrated the nation's willingness to accept the southern white version of history and positioned the Wilmington Race Riot within the larger narrative of sectional reunion and American imperialism. This version of the riot, bolstered by Dixon's novel, remained unchallenged until the 1980s, when historians began analyzing the event in great detail. When Philip Gerard published *Cape Fear Rising* (1994), he found an audience more willing to discuss the race riot. Yet, in some ways, the political and cultural landscape of Wilmington remained under the influence of the narrative constructed by Democrats in 1898.²

¹ William Dean Howells, "A Psychological Counter-current in Recent Fiction," *North American Review* 173 (December 1901).

² For a general survey of southern memories, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage "Introduction: No Deed but Memory," in *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000): pg. 1-28. Several authors have utilized the study of memory to examine the Wilmington Race Riot. Catherine Bishir has noted the impact that the 1898 Democratic victories had upon the cultural landscapes of Raleigh and Wilmington. See "Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past in Raleigh and Wilmington, North Carolina, 1885-1915," in *Where These Memories Grow*, pg. 139-168. In *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chesnut* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), Matthew Wilson examined the counter-narrative presented by Charles Chesnut in *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901). Leslie H. Hossfeld examined the political uses of memories of the riot, paying particular attention to silences and changes in the discourse on race relations and memory in the century after the riot. See *Narrative, Political Unconscious, and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina* (New York: Routledge, 2005). This essay draws inspiration from these works, and readers will detect their influences. In some ways this essay is synthetic, assembling the relevant parts of these works into a more complete story of the memory of the Wilmington Race Riot. Yet even a synthetic work would fail to address the significance of the work by David Bryant Fulton and Thomas Dixon. Furthermore, Hossfeld's discussion of Gerard's novel merely addresses the public response. This essay offers a comprehensive analysis of the literary and public debates over the history and memory of the Wilmington Race Riot.

Public Memory

Newly appointed mayor Alfred Moore Waddell offered *Collier's Weekly* a first-hand account of the Wilmington Race Riot. His account provided the structure and substance of the collective memory of events for nearly a century. Waddell's story whitewashed the bloodshed and disorder that historians have since associated with the riot. He attributed the disturbance to the leading white Fusionists, among them Governor Daniel L. Russell, "the engineer of all the deviltry and meanness." The "deviltry" to which Waddell referred was the political and economic advancement of African Americans in Wilmington; he declared that whites should restore proper white government in the Port City.

Waddell argued that he had preserved order on November 10, 1898 and prevented the brutal lynchings that had been associated with the South in the 1890s. He described the fire at Alexander Manly's offices as "purely accidental." Commenting that the fire "was unintentional on our part," Waddell argued that white leaders did not intend to destroy private property. He implied that the poor classes of whites who served in Mike Dowling's Red Shirt brigade set the fire. He recalled the speech he gave after the destruction of the *Daily Record* offices, in which he pleaded for order: "[L]et us go quietly to our homes, and about our business, and obey the law, unless we are forced, in self-defense, to do otherwise." In another incident, Waddell recounted a mob's futile attempt to remove seven blacks from the jail and "destroy them." As the newly "elected" mayor, Waddell claimed that he stood for law and order, "stay[ing] up the whole night myself, and the forces stayed up all night, and we saved those wretched creatures' lives." Waddell knew that the image of the South had been tarnished by accounts of lynchings across the region; his essay deflected any comparisons between mob violence and the riot by simply erasing the bloodshed. Instead, he emphasized the ways in which white leaders protected the interests of African Americans. Describing the paternalistic duties of his office for *Collier's Weekly* readers, Waddell recounted visits by two African Americans who requested that he return property (a jack-knife and some cattle) confiscated during the riot. He also mentioned those African Americans who sought "protection against imaginary trouble, and for what I consider would be persecution – that spirit of cruelty that a revolution always develops; people who gratify their animosity and personal spite." Waddell again deflected responsibility for "persecution" upon men of low character who preyed upon the weakness of others. He assured readers that the disorder had subsided and that black Wilmingtonians embraced the new order.³ The perspective solicited by *Collier's Weekly* appeared, with a few variations, in articles featured in northern newspapers. The Democrats successfully defended their revolution and prevented federal intervention. In the years that followed, David Fulton and Charles Chesnut attempted to help their readers "remember what they had been taught to forget," namely the facts of the Wilmington Race Riot.⁴

³ Alfred Moore Waddell, "The Story of the Wilmington, N.C., Race Riots," *Collier's Weekly*, November 26, 1898, pg. 4-5. In a letter to Edward Oldham, Waddell claimed that he did not write the essay; he merely had "a conversation which Mr. (Charles) Bourke of that paper took down as I talked to him. I think I would have written better than that." Waddell neglected to mention that Bourke lived in Wilmington, and, even if one were to believe his story, Waddell admitted offered a ghostwriter his account of the riot. Letter to Edward Oldham, November 29, 1898, Edward Oldham Papers, Duke University.

⁴ Wilson, *Whiteness*, pg. 99.

David Fulton's *Hanover*

African American David Fulton offered the first literary response to the public memory of the riot. Born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, Fulton moved to Wilmington during Reconstruction. He began his writing career as a journalist for the black-owned *Record* under the *nom de plume* Jack Thorne. In 1887, he moved to New York City, where he was a porter for the Pullman Palace Car Company. From his experiences as a porter, Fulton developed his first published work, *Recollections of a Sleeping Car Porter* (1892). In 1900, Fulton published *Hanover, or: The Persecution of the Lowly: A Story of the Wilmington Massacre*, a thinly veiled work of fiction that attempted to expose the realities of the riot.⁵

Fulton employed several devices to indicate the accuracy of *Hanover*. The novel opens with an Associated Press report of the race riot, and the introduction presents a brief history of Wilmington. Fulton appropriated the identities of principal figures in Wilmington. Alexander Manly, Armond Scott, William Henderson, and George Z. French are among those mentioned by name; Fulton only changed the names of the leading white conspirators. Fulton also included a letter from Mrs. Adelaide Peterson (likely a pseudonym), who provides the reader with a first-hand black perspective of the violence. Despite these efforts, *Hanover* failed to challenge the popular interpretation of events.

In the introduction, Fulton dismisses cries of “NEGRO DOMINATION” by citing the superior number of white men in government offices and offers a theory regarding the conspiracy behind the Wilmington Race Riot. He proposes that the leading men of Wilmington devised the plot with the aid of whites from neighboring states and \$30,000 in firearms. The semi-fictional text explores this theory in more detail by presenting a series of vignettes around the city. The Colonel, representing Alfred Moore Waddell, identifies the problem facing Wilmington when he observes that the city government is controlled by “[t]he Negro and the ‘low white’... holding positions in the city government that rightfully belong to the first families who are better qualified to hold said positions and more entitled to remunerations.”⁶ Teck Pervis, the leader of the poor whites of Wilmington, joins this elitist revolution, having been swayed by talk of black lust for their daughters, and serve as “[t]he cat’s paw – the tool of the aristocrat, he stands ready to do the dirty work of lynching, burning, and intimidation.”⁷ Fulton challenged the popular account of the riot, claiming that the Red Shirts acted on the orders of Wilmington’s elite, executing their plan to deadly perfection. He exposed the Democratic campaign’s manipulation of fears of black sexuality.

Fulton exposes the hypocrisy of this tactic in his treatment of the mulatto Molly Pierrepont. He introduces her by describing white violations of the color line. Challenging the image of the black beast rapist, Fulton suggests that the more accurate image is the African American man “afraid to defend his own home” from white men intent upon “the destruction of the Negro woman.” Pierrepont, the daughter of a mulatto slave brutally raped by her own white father, has rejected her African American heritage and chosen to be the mistress of white

⁵ William Andrews, “Jack Thorne [David Bryant Fulton],” in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, ed. by Rayford Logan and Michael Winston (New York: Norton, 1982): pg. 589-590.

⁶ Thorne, *Hanover*, pg. 9-10, 17.

⁷ Thorne, *Hanover*, pg. 26.

conspirator Ben Hartright. When he reveals the plot to overthrow the government and terrorize the city's black community, she criticizes him for "thirsting for the blood of a slanderer of white women" even as he conceals their affair from his wife and plots to murder innocent black men and women. Pierrepont realizes that her fate is linked to the fate of black Wilmingtonians. Hartright assures her that she will be saved, stating, "You are no Nigger, you are nearly as white as I am." Pierrepont asks, "Do you mean to try to choke it down my throat that my whiteness would save me should your people rise up against Niggers in Wilmington?" She realizes that he only recognizes her whiteness because she has given herself to him. Hartright has convinced her that her whiteness is her redeeming quality.⁸ Her decision to spurn Hartright and warn the black community about the eminent dangers reflects Fulton's belief in race pride.

Rather than focus on whites' violence, Fulton placed blacks' responses at the center of *Hanover*. In particular, Fulton's vignettes recount black women's determination to protect their race and command respect reserved for white women. When Pierrepont realizes that the revolution has begun and the black employees of the Cotton Press are in danger, she leaves the safety of her home to warn them. When a group of white boys stop her, the reader observes the interplay between race and gender. One of the boys orders his cohorts to lower their weapons in the presence of a white lady, only to be informed that "she's no lady; she's er nigger!" Upon this realization, the order is given to "tear her clothes from her." Her blackness does not protect her body from invasion; on the contrary, because her color denies her claim to womanhood, her assailants have access to her. Pierrepont refuses to be inspected by these white boys; when her rebuke attracts a group of white men, she faces two generations of white males, "glar[ing] like hungry wolves," eager to perform their racial privilege. She draws a revolver in order to prevent the search, and the men permit her to pass and complete her mission.⁹ In another example, Lizzie Smith challenges a white mob assaulting another black woman. One of the men orders Smith to reveal any weapons that she is carrying. In response, Smith sheds her clothing, declaring, "I'll take off ma clothes, so yo' won't have ter tear 'em... you'll fin' I am 'jes like yo' sisters an' mammies." This incident inspires the sympathy of on-looking white women, who chastise the men for violating Smith's womanhood.¹⁰ Literary critic Sandra Gunning has noted that this act "unites her (Smith) with the white femininity Rebecca Felton claims to be under assault."¹¹ Describing the experiences of African American women during the riot, Fulton exposes the dishonorable behavior of the "superior" race (the white beast rapist) and black women's defense of their race and gender.

Fulton offered readers a more complex image of African American men. He praises the black men who defended their homes from the white mob. As others flee from the white assault on Brooklyn, Dan Wright defends his community to the death. Fulton questions, "Died Dan Wright as a fool dieth?" Answering negatively, Fulton equates Wright's bravery with the efforts of "Leonidas, Buoy, Davy Crocket, Daniel Boone, Nathan Hale, Wolf, Napoleon, (Robert) Smalls, Cushing, Lawrence, John Brown, Nat Turner."¹² Despite this praise, Fulton also

⁸ Thorne, *Hanover*, pg. 35-39.

⁹ Thorne, *Hanover*, pg. 81-83.

¹⁰ Thorne, *Hanover*, pg. 95-96.

¹¹ Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of Lynching, 1890-1912* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pg. 94.

¹² Thorne, *Hanover*, pg. 85.

chastises the cowardice of black men. For example, Captain Nicholas McDuffy, a black man who once served on the police force and arrested a white man, discovers that his name appears on the list of the damned. He flees to New Bern and leaves his wife and son at the mercy of the white mob, which burns the family home.¹³ Wright exemplifies black manhood by defending his family and home. McDuffy relinquishes any claim to manhood when he sacrifices his family in the interest of self-preservation.

Fulton offered readers a theory to explain this cowardice. Bill Sikes exemplifies the emasculated black man. Sikes, once one of the strongest and wealthiest blacks in Wilmington but now crippled and dependent on his wife for survival, lives “in constant terror, hanging on her (his wife’s) skirts like a babe” during the riot. The couple leaves Wilmington, because, as Sikes explains to the Colonel, “I’m not goin’ ter stay in er place where a d—n scoundrel can insult ma wife an’ I can’t pect her.” Sikes protests the loss of manhood. He wishes to rekindle his manhood, and he and his wife move to New York.

Most of the blacks depicted in *Hanover* migrate, either by force or choice, to northern cities, where they find a greater degree of acceptance and safety. When Sikes proposes that they return to Wilmington, his wife declares that she will never return: “Life is not so easy here, but I can walk the streets as a lady and my children are free to play and romp without fear of being killed for accidentally or purposefully treading upon the toe of a white child.”¹⁴ The northern city also provides a better environment in which to cultivate racial pride. Rather than renounce her blackness, Pierrepont embraces her race and “nobly” represents black America in New York City. Fulton presented readers with a pessimistic story of black life in the South and portrayed the North as the best hope for the African American.

Fulton failed to overcome his literary obscurity and reach a large audience. Despite the historical basis of his account of the riot, Fulton failed to alter the dominant narrative of events. In 1902, the *Wilmington Messenger* referenced the publication of *Hanover* without even mentioning the title or author in a review of a more widely circulated fictionalization of the Wilmington Race Riot.¹⁵

***The Marrow of Tradition* by Charles Chesnutt**

The *Wilmington Messenger* devoted most of the review to Charles W. Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), a novel that blended elements of the Wilmington Race Riot and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900.¹⁶ Chesnutt realized the potential of a career in writing after the

¹³ Thorne, *Hanover*, pg. 107.

¹⁴ Thorne, *Hanover*, pg. 129, 134.

¹⁵ *Wilmington Messenger*, January 7, 1902, quoted in Wilson, *Whiteness*.

¹⁶ Charles Chesnutt, “Charles Chesnutt’s Own View of His New Story, *The Marrow of Tradition*,” *Cleveland World*, October 20, 1901, published in *Charles W. Chesnutt, Stories, Novels, and Essays*, ed. by Werner Sollers (Library of America, 2002): pg. 873. Scholars rarely note the influence that the New Orleans Riot had upon the novel; the events in Wilmington dominate Chesnutt’s work, but one might conclude that Josh Green, the black rebel who defends the black community from the white mob, was inspired by Robert Charles, the black rebel whose altercation with abusive police officers sparked widespread violence in New Orleans. The primary materials written by

publication of Albion Tourgee's *A Fool's Errand*. He attributed the popularity of that novel to a national interest in African Americans. He believed that he could provide a more accurate portrayal of the black community than Tourgee. Chesnutt published several short stories in the McClure chain of newspapers, and *Atlantic Monthly* published two dialect stories by Chesnutt in 1887 and 1888. In 1899, Chesnutt published *The Conjure Woman*, a collection of stories building upon the traditions of African American folklore. A year later, he published *The House Behind the Cedars*, an exploration of the color line that Chesnutt himself straddled. He originally completed this novel in 1889, entitling it *Rena Walden*, but when he circulated the manuscript among his white friends, he found them unreceptive to the problems posed by the color line.¹⁷

Chesnutt's treatment of the color line challenged contemporary notions of race and race relations. *The Marrow of Tradition* represented another contribution to the nation's racial discourse. He responded to the criticism of *Rena Walden* in a letter to George Washington Cable, writing, "I suspect that my way of looking at these things is 'amorphous' not in the sense of being unnatural, but unusual."¹⁸ In the years that followed, Chesnutt articulated the belief that whites constructed an "unnatural" concept of race. In the late nineteenth century, popular racial thought utilized scientific explanations that racialized every aspect of human behavior. The contemporary view of blacks stated that they were naturally inferior to whites. Chesnutt wrote a number of essays that revealed policies among white Southerners that suggested the races were not so easily classified. In 1889, Chesnutt published an essay entitled "What is a White Man?," in which he examined the laws that attempted to solidify the color line. He examined state Supreme Court rulings in South Carolina, in which two standards were established for identifying an individual's race: (1) physical features; and (2) "reception into society, and by their exercise of the privileges of a white man."¹⁹ The latter means of defining one's race provided light-skinned mulattoes with the opportunity to pass into white society, thereby disrupting the color line. Chesnutt also mocked white obsession with preserving the color line of their race given whites' transgressions across it, noting that marriage laws were necessary because "Nature, by some unaccountable oversight... neglected a matter so important to the future prosperity and progress of mankind" by permitting physical attraction between blacks and whites. His essay exposed the permeability of the color line, the difficulty of defining whiteness, and the transgressions that blurred the races.²⁰

In a series of essays entitled "The Future American," published in the *Boston Evening Transcript* in 1900, Chesnutt predicted that the interbreeding of whites, blacks, and Indians would eventually create a racially mixed citizenry. Realizing the advantages of being white, Chesnutt once flirted with the idea of passing into white society. He eventually reached the

Chesnutt are available on-line at <http://www.berea.edu/faculty/browsers/chesnutt/intro.html>, a website created by Berea College English professor Stephanie Berea.

¹⁷ John W. Wideman, "Chesnutt, Charles Waddell," in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, pg. 103-107; William L. Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), pg. 11-12.

¹⁸ Quoted in Andrews, *Literary Career*, pg. 27.

¹⁹ Charles Chesnutt, "What is a White Man?," *The Independent* 41 (May 30, 1889): 5-6.

²⁰ Chesnutt, "What is a White Man?," 5-6; Wilson, *Whiteness*, pg. 6-7.

conclusion that passing merely accepted racial distinctions as a reality.²¹ Citing the example of Aleksandr Pushkin and Alexandre Dumas, Chesnutt argued that Europeans did not hide their mixed ancestry “because it carried with it no social stigma or disability whatever.” Through these examples, Chesnutt argued that race was a “social fiction.” He believed that white society’s racial formulas neglected ability and virtue, which should be most relevant in defining one’s social status. Racial interbreeding would require society to rank its members based upon these terms. Chesnutt and Fulton disagreed about the importance of racial solidarity. Whereas Fulton promoted race pride, Chesnutt revealed his own views on race, color, and class in this series, writing, “[I]f, in time, the more objectionable Negro traits are eliminated, and his better qualities correspondingly developed, his part in the future American race may well be an important and valuable one.”²² Rather than advocating race pride as Fulton had in *Hanover*, Chesnutt promoted the elimination of all racial distinctions in favor of ability and character.

Chesnutt wrote *The Marrow of Tradition* with two goals in mind. First, he hoped to entertain readers; he recognized that the future of his literary career depended upon the financial success of his novels. Second, Chesnutt crafted a “purpose novel” in order to educate Northerners about the racial problems unfolding in the South.²³ Chesnutt built his story around events with which his audience would be familiar. Although he based the novel in part upon the New Orleans Riot of 1900, he depended primarily on the events in Wilmington in 1898. He visited North Carolina in order to compile information for his manuscript. He received letters from North Carolinians describing black life after the 1898 election and the subsequent riot. As he revealed in a letter to the wife of former Wilmington resident William Henderson, the novel was also influenced by a story told to him by Dr. Thomas Mask, who still lived in the Port City. Mask recounted with “vivid description... of the events of the riot.”²⁴ His research offered a factual counter-weight to the public memory.

The novel centers on the white Carterets and the mulatto Millers, the leading families of Wellington. Major Carteret edits the Democratic *Morning Chronicle*, and Dr. William Miller operates a hospital in the black community. Their wives connect the two families; Olivia Carteret’s father married his housekeeper, who subsequently gave birth to Janet Miller. The Carteret family wishes to preserve the color line by concealing the familial relationship between Janet and Olivia, and the Millers wish to replace the color line with economic and social classifications.

²¹ Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition, 1877-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pg. 173, 177.

²² Charles Chesnutt, “A Stream of Dark Blood in the Veins of the Southern Whites” *Boston Evening Transcript*, August 25, 1900, in *Stories, Novels, and Essays*, pg. 854-855; “A Complete Race-Amalgamation Likely to Occur” *Boston Evening Transcript* September 1, 1900, in *Stories, Novels, and Essays*, pg. 861, 863; Stephen P. Knadler, “Untragic Mulatto: Charles Chesnutt and the Discourse of Whiteness,” *American Literary History* 8 (Autumn 1996): 429; Dean McWilliams, *Charles Chesnutt and the Fictions of Race* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), pg. 54-55.

²³ Chesnutt, “Chesnutt’s Own View,” pg. 872. Chesnutt sent copies of *The Marrow of Tradition* to several congressmen. In ensuing correspondence, the politicians compared the novel with Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots*.

²⁴ Letter to Walter Hines Page, March 22, 1899, and Letter to Mrs. W.B. Henderson, November 11, 1905, published in “*To Be An Author*”: *Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt, 1889-1905*, ed. by Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Robert C. Leitz III (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): pg. 121, 233-234.

The Marrow of Tradition centers upon a plot crafted by Major Carteret, General Belmont, and Captain George McBane to seize control of the city and cast off “nigger domination.” Carteret and Belmont are white patricians who wish to resume control over Wellington. McBane, the son of an overseer and himself once a member of the Ku Klux Klan, exemplifies the unrefined New Southerner whose social standing is determined by wealth rather than birth. Chesnutt’s triumvirate criticize the bi-racial government, claiming that African Americans are unfit for politics. Carteret’s editorials espouse the same rhetoric that the Democrats injected into the 1898 election. The title of the novel refers to the anachronistic rhetoric of white supremacy that continued to persist in the South. These men employ this rhetoric to stir racial hatred in Wellington.

As scholar Stephen Knadler noted, Chesnutt illustrated that whiteness was “a performance mandated at particular historical moments for its political advantageousness and its suppression of other group identities such as class or ethnicity.” In order to expose the fiction of race, Chesnutt offers the example of Jerry, Carteret’s black porter, who sits outside the editor’s office and mimics the talk of “Angry Saxons” and expresses his desire to be white. Jerry even purchases a kit that promises to turn an African-American into an Anglo-American. Although Jerry’s racial conversion fails, the conversation that Jerry mimics reveals that whiteness must be claimed; if whiteness was a natural state, these declarations would be superfluous.²⁵

Chesnutt deflects claims of black criminality, one of the main components of the white supremacy rhetoric, back onto whites with the murder of Polly Ochiltree, Olivia Carteret’s aunt. Tom Delamere, grandson of old Mr. Delamere, the aging aristocrat, robs Ochiltree to pay off a gambling debt. Disguised as his grandfather’s faithful servant Sandy Campbell, Tom scares the woman, and she collapses and suffers a fatal blow to the head. Tom leaves a trail of evidence leading back to Campbell. A special edition of Carteret’s newspaper implies that the culprit also raped Ochiltree, which encourages white men to form a lynch mob to execute their own brand of justice.²⁶ Miller brings the elder Delamere to defend his servant from a lynch mob. When the truth is discovered, Delamere urges Carteret to publish the information in order to save Sandy’s life. Carteret instead concocts a story about an unknown black man who committed the crime and fled the city, perpetuating local fears of a burly black brute preying on white women.²⁷

When this plot unfolds and the white mob terrorizes the black community, Miller refuses to join the defensive force led by Josh Green, a poor black who speaks in the same dialect as the black characters of Chesnutt’s earlier short stories. Miller contends that he may be of more use to his people in life than in martyrdom, yet in Miller, Chesnutt notes “a distinct feeling of shame and envy that he, too, did not feel impelled to throw away his life in a hopeless struggle.”²⁸ Green’s decision, motivated in part by the opportunity to exact revenge upon McBane for killing his father, leads to his death. Echoing Fulton’s question regarding the fate of Dan Wright,

²⁵ Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1901; reprinted Penguin Books, 1993), pg. 31, 90; Chesnutt, “Chesnutt’s Own View,” pg. 872; McWilliams, *Fictions of Race*, pg. 153; Knadler, “Untragic Mulatto,” pg. 434. For a discussion of the consumption of race, see Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

²⁶ Chesnutt, *Marrow of Tradition*, pg. 190.

²⁷ Wilson, *Whiteness*, pg. 132-133.

²⁸ Chesnutt, *Marrow of Tradition*, pg. 282, 285.

Chesnutt asks the reader if Green “died as the fool dieth.”²⁹ The answer within the text lacks Fulton’s certainty, but Chesnutt’s nonfiction offers clues to his true opinion. For example, Chesnutt advocated violence in self-defense of life, liberty, and property in an essay published in 1891. Offering more proof of Chesnutt’s support of the tactics employed by Miller and Green, William Gleason noted a passage in Chesnutt’s biography of Frederick Douglass that compared Douglass and John Brown: “each played the part for which he was adapted. It would have strengthened the cause of liberty very little for Douglass to die with Brown.”³⁰ One might conclude that Chesnutt would have expressed similar sentiments about Miller and Green.

Chesnutt suggested that race baiting inspired hatred beyond the control of its architects, reflecting Waddell’s image of a mob beyond the control of its leaders. While observing the shootout at Miller’s hospital between the armies of Green and McBane, Carteret declares, “I meant to keep them (blacks) in their places – I did not intend wholesale murder and arson.” He implores the white mob to withdraw, shouting, “Gentlemen, this is murder and madness; it is a disgrace to our city, our state, to our civilization!” Carteret fails to realize that he used similar language to describe Negro rule in order to incite white anger. His words merely intensify the mob’s thirst for blood.³¹ In one sense, Chesnutt supported Waddell’s claims that the lower classes terrorized the African American community; yet the novelist held the conspirators culpable for inciting the frenzy on November 10, 1898.

At the climax of the novel, the Carterets must turn to Miller to save the life of their son. At this last hour, Olivia Carteret acknowledges her half-sister, appealing to their shared blood and motherly instincts. Chesnutt presents a scene in which the “traditional” roles are reversed. Olivia first appeals to Dr. Miller, “at the feet of a negro, this proud white woman.” He directs her to his wife for judgment: “The sad-eyed Janet towered erect, with menacing aspect, like an avenging goddess. The other [Olivia], whose pride had been her life, stood in the attitude of a trembling supplicant.” Having lost her own son to a stray bullet during the course of events that day, Janet refuses to accept “your father’s name, your father’s wealth, your sisterly recognition,” yet she agrees to permit her husband to save young Carteret. When Miller arrives at the Carteret home, the young doctor tending to the boy warns, “There’s time enough, but none to spare.”³² Describing the novel in the *Cleveland World*, Chesnutt assured readers, “The book is not a study in pessimism, for it is the writer’s belief that the forces of progress will in the end prevail, and that in time a remedy may be found for every social ill.”³³ Some scholars have questioned the optimism of the novel’s closing passage. Citing the extensive description of Dodie Carteret given at his birth, Jae H. Roe argued that Miller saves the “embodiment” of southern racism. Matthew Wilson argued that the closing passage was “a sleight of hand” trick in which Chesnutt gave white readers the illusion of hope for reconciliation. Wilson contended that *The Marrow of Tradition* marked a shift for Chesnutt away from the rhetoric of amalgamation articulated in the “Future American” series in favor of separatism, symbolized by Janet’s rejection of her sister’s

²⁹ Chesnutt, *Marrow of Tradition*, pg. 309.

³⁰ Charles W. Chesnutt, “A Multitude of Counselors,” *The Independent* 43 (April 2, 1891): 4-5; William Gleason, “Voices at the Nadir: Charles Chesnutt and David Bryant Fulton,” in *Critical Essays on Charles Chesnutt*, ed. by Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. (New York: G.K. Hall, 1999): pg. 235.

³¹ Chesnutt, *Marrow of Tradition*, pg. 305.

³² Chesnutt, *Marrow of Tradition*, pg. 324, 326, 328-329.

³³ “Chesnutt’s Own View,” pg. 873.

recognition.³⁴ These interpretations failed to place proper emphasis upon the postures of the characters in the closing scene. Janet Miller claims moral superiority over the Carteret family.³⁵

Critics questioned Chesnutt's perception of reality. William Dean Howells, a friend of Chesnutt, called the book "bitter," but he qualified this assessment, writing that "[t]here is no reason in history why it should not be so, if wrong is to be repaid with hate, and yet it would be better if it was not so bitter."³⁶ Most critics revealed that they did not agree with Chesnutt's interpretation. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* criticized Chesnutt for basing the Wellington Race Riot upon events uncharacteristic of the South, thereby creating "a false perspective when regarded from the viewpoint of real life." Several reviews criticized Chesnutt for crafting characterizations and stereotypes rather than characters. Expressing a negative opinion in the *Atlanta Journal*, Katherine Glover called the novel "silly rot," criticizing the characterization of every African American as virtuous and every white as villainous. These negative reviews illustrate the point made by Matthew Wilson that white audiences conditioned by the historical romances of Thomas Nelson Page and the popular narrative of the events in Wilmington would reject *The Marrow of Tradition* as the truth turned on its head.³⁷

Nonetheless, the book remained a favorite of the literary elite but did not gain a public following. *The Marrow of Tradition* only sold 3,276 copies; in one instance, a Cleveland bookstore requested that Houghton, Mifflin, and Company accept the return of most of their copies.³⁸ Chesnutt failed to capture the imagination of readers, and Waddell's narrative continued to inform the masses.

Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots*

In 1902, Thomas Dixon, Jr. presented a variation of Waddell's narrative within his best-selling novel *The Leopard's Spots*. In contrast to Chesnutt's sluggish sales, Dixon's novel sold more than a million copies, reflecting the popularity and power of the southern white perspective. Born and raised in North Carolina, Dixon, a Baptist minister, carried his message to northern congregations in 1887.³⁹ Dixon's politicized sermons addressed topics such as immigration, industrialization, and urbanization. During the Spanish-American War, his sermons focused heavily on the nation's role in international affairs. The issue of race was a recurring theme of the sermons Dixon delivered in 1898.⁴⁰

³⁴ Jae H. Roe, "Keeping an 'Old Wound' Alive: *The Marrow of Tradition* and the Legacy of Wilmington," *African American Review* 33 (1999): 238; Wilson, *Whiteness*, pg. 140.

³⁵ McWilliams, *Fictions of Race*, pg. 165.

³⁶ Howells, "A Psychological Counter-current," reprinted in *Critical Essays on Charles Chesnutt*, pg. 82.

³⁷ Review of *The Marrow of Tradition*, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 9, 1901; Katherine Glover, "News in the World of Books," *Atlanta Journal*, December 14, 1901, pg. 4; "Book Review of *The Marrow of Tradition*," *Independent* 54 (March 1902): 582; Wilson, *Whiteness*, pg. 126-127.

³⁸ Wilson, *Whiteness*, pg. 101; "To Be An Author", pg. 174, n2.

³⁹ The standard biography of Thomas Dixon remains Raymond Allen Cook's *Fire from the Flint: The Amazing Careers of Thomas Dixon* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1968). Joel Williamson offers a psychological study of Dixon in *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁴⁰ While at Johns Hopkins University, Dixon came under the influence of Herbert Baxter Adams, who taught the Teutonic germ theory. The theory stated a set of ideas had been carried out of the forests of Germany and delivered

In a sermon delivered at the nondenominational People's Church in New York City, Dixon offered "A Friendly Warning to the Negro." Dixon declared, "The negro in American is now entering the gravest crises of his life as a race. If he is worthy he will survive. If he is not, he will be ground into powder."⁴¹ He placed southern African Americans in two categories: demagogues such as Alexander Manly and sensible leaders such as Booker T. Washington. According to Dixon, the African American community must withdraw from politics and banish men like Manly in order to cultivate relationships with their white benefactors. Commenting on the political revolution in North Carolina in 1898, Dixon declared that the state, but particularly Wilmington, would no longer live under Negro rule, characterized by "chaos, corruption, anarchy."⁴² In the event that blacks could not accept this outcome, Dixon recommended that they migrate to the North, the western territories, or one of the newly acquired territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific.⁴³

Dixon believed that Wilmington represented a critical moment in the nation's history. In a letter to Alfred Moore Waddell's widow, Gabrielle DeRosset Waddell, Dixon wrote of his admiration of the former mayor of Wilmington and assured the widow that her husband and the "Wilmington revolutionists did a very important work in the preservation of our civilization."⁴⁴ Dixon envisioned a white America, free from the taint of black blood and prepared to fulfill its imperialist "mission." In search of a larger audience, he began writing novels. His fictional treatment of the riot in *The Leopard's Spots* articulated this vision.

The Leopard's Spots tells the story of Charlie Gaston, son of a fallen Confederate soldier, who wanders through postbellum North Carolina under the guidance of Reverend John Durham. The minister articulates the sermons on race that Dixon delivered in New York City in the late 1890s. Durham regularly advises Gaston that America will either be Anglo Saxon or mulatto; this theory presupposes that, given the ballot and political offices, the black man will desire white women. The only possible result of this situation will be a mongrel race of Americans. Contrary to Chesnut, Dixon believed that the color line must be preserved at all costs. Gaston articulates his mentor's lessons into a public policy which states that African American men must accept a subordinate position in society and withdraw from politics or leave the country.⁴⁵

Gaston visits Independence, North Carolina, the setting for Dixon's fictionalized account of the Wilmington Race Riot, to pay his respects to a regiment returning from the Spanish-American War. During his visit, a white man beats a black man to death for "jostling" his white female companion in a sidewalk encounter. The Fusion government blames Gaston for creating

the British Isles, where it spawned democratic institutions that were carried across the Atlantic to the American colonies. Adams's germ theory provided a scientific foundation for the racial theories that Dixon formulated in the late 1890s. The "biological" evidence supported his belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority and the foolishness of the postbellum political "experiment" involving African Americans. See James T. Rostar, "Johns Hopkins University and the Teutonic Germ," *North Carolina Literary Review* 2 (Spring 1994), pg. 92.

⁴¹ Thomas Dixon, *Dixon's Sermons, Delivered in the Grand Opera House, New York, 1898-1899* (New York: F.L. Bussey, 1899), pg. 112, 114.

⁴² Dixon, *Dixon's Sermons*, pg. 117-118.

⁴³ Dixon, *Dixon's Sermons*, pg. 119.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pg. 136.

⁴⁵ Thomas Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1902; reprinted Salon Publishing Company, Norborne, Missouri, n.d.), pg. 435-448.

turmoil among the races and attempts to murder him. Gaston evades the plot and decrees that the city's Republican leadership and the "Negro Anarchist" editor must leave the city three days before the November election in order to end Negro rule and lawlessness. His terms are accepted and executed in a peaceful manner, but "a mob of a thousand armed Negroes concealed themselves in a hedgerow and fired on them from ambush, killing one man and wounding six. Gaston formed his men in line, returned fire with deadly effect, charged the mob, put them to flight, driving them into the woods."⁴⁶ In Dixon's portrayal, the white army represents law and order, whereas the black mob typifies the disorder of Fusion rule. The Red Shirts appear in Dixon's novel as "a spontaneous combustion of inflammable racial power that has been accumulating for a generation."⁴⁷ Dixon portrayed racial violence as a natural response to perceived political and social oppression which, according to southern collective memory, was unleashed by Northerners during Reconstruction and resurrected by the Republican-Populist Fusion government in the 1890s.

Dixon articulated a version of events similar to the popular narrative. Written to clarify Northern confusion about the postbellum South, Dixon idealized the riot, omitting the political coup and justifying the bloodshed as a response to black aggression. Retold in Dixon's nationalistic and imperialist language, the Wilmington Race Riot became a crucial event in the nation's history.⁴⁸

The Wilmington Race Riot received little attention over the next century. Despite the absence of discussion, the riot was not forgotten. *The Leopard's Spots* reinterpreted the defeat of the Fusion government and the disfranchisement of African Americans as an essential part of sectional reunion and national progress. The Civil War, Radical Reconstruction, and Fusion politics were uncharacteristic periods in Southern history, and whites resorted to whatever means necessary to restore the traditional racial order. This restoration was integrated into the cultural landscape in North Carolina. Catherine W. Bishir noted the far-reaching cultural changes underway in Raleigh and Wilmington after the "Revolution of 1898." Architectural tastes and the commemoration movement emphasized continuity, harmony, and, perhaps most importantly, Anglo-Saxon authority. Newly built homes reflected the popularity of the "Colonial Revival" style that linked the Old and New South in the minds of their owners, "captur[ing] in modern terms the symbols of that glorious past." Confederate memorials marked the landscape around government buildings. Public ceremonies to dedicate these landmarks provided an articulation of the meanings intended by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Colonial Dames of America. These developments reiterated the belief that the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Fusion politics were temporary disruptions in southern history, characterized by Anglo-Saxon supremacy. The violence that occurred in Wilmington in 1898 slipped into the background, but whites resurrected the memory of the bloodshed in order to quell dissent within Wilmington's African American community. For example, when North Carolina Governor Joseph Broughton attended the launching of the Liberty Ship *John Merrick* in Wilmington in 1943, he raised the

⁴⁶ Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, pg. 414-416.

⁴⁷ Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, pg. 419.

⁴⁸ Andrews, *Literary Career*, pg. 184-185; Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching*, pg. 31; Wilson, *Whiteness*, pg. 121-122.

specter of 1898 as “a cautionary tale” for blacks.⁴⁹ Historian Melton A. McLaurin has suggested that the city’s black community preserved a counter-memory of the riot, but white city leaders refused to acknowledge this version in public discourse or commemoration.⁵⁰

Rewriting the Wilmington Race Riot: *Cape Fear Rising*

Philip Gerard’s *Cape Fear Rising* (1994) publicly challenged the popular narrative of the events of the fall of 1898. Gerard, a creative writing professor at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, mixed fact and fiction to tell the story of “what makes a community a community and how easy it is to fracture.”⁵¹ Gerard depicted the inner workings of the groups that conspired to overthrow the Fusion government. Hugh MacRae, J. Allan Taylor, and Alfred Moore Waddell emerge from *Cape Fear Rising* as the true architects of the violence. MacRae and Taylor orchestrate the coup, while Waddell mobilizes the masses and forms alliances that place him at the center of power in Wilmington.

The novelist pays particular attention to the experiences of Sam and Gray Ellen Jenks, a Philadelphia couple who move to Wilmington after Sam’s cousin, Hugh MacRae, secures a position for him with the Democratic Wilmington *Messenger*. Sam eventually realizes that MacRae expects him to support the white revolution. Haunted by alcoholism, sexual temptation, a failing marriage, and lies about his experiences in Spanish-American War, Sam implicitly supports the movement led by men whom he believes are much better than himself. As the riot reaches its conclusion, Sam, appalled by the senseless white-on-black violence, accepts the futility of resisting the tide of white rule. Gray Ellen, a liberal on race issues, teaches at Williston, the local African American school. As a result of her contact with the black community, she finds herself under the spell of Ivanhoe Grant, a mysterious mulatto minister who educates her about the reality of the color line and plays an important role in the escalation of racial tensions. The relationship between Gray Ellen and Grant leads to the banishment of the Jenkses.

Gerard credits MacRae and J. Allan Taylor with orchestrating the violence, despite the protests of fellow conspirators such as William Kenan, George Rountree, and Walker Taylor. Unlike Chesnutt, Gerard contends that the conspirators controlled the actions of the poor whites. MacRae keeps Mike Dowling and the Red Shirts under control before the election in order to avoid federal intervention. As they await the black response to the White Declaration of Independence, MacRae expresses his determination to suppress the black population through violence. He advises J. Allan Taylor, “They (African Americans) can all sign over the deeds to their houses, it wouldn’t change what we have to do.”⁵² Gerard repeats Waddell’s account of events at the *Daily Record* office; uncontrollable Red Shirts exceed the level of violence that he

⁴⁹ Catherine W. Bishir, “Landmarks of Power,” pg. 140, 147-155; Timothy Tyson, “Wars for Democracy: African American Militancy and Interracial Violence in North Carolina during World War II,” in *Democracy Betrayed*, pg. 254-255; Leslie H. Hossfeld, *Narrative*, pg. 66-67.

⁵⁰ Melton A. McLaurin, “Commemorating Wilmington’s Racial Violence of 1898: From Individual to Collective Memory,” *Southern Cultures* 6 (2000): pg. 41-42.

⁵¹ Scott Whisnant, “Violent White Revolt in 1898 Basis of New Historical Novel,” Wilmington *Sunday Star-News*, February 13, 1994, pg. 7A.

⁵² Gerard, *Cape Fear Rising*, pg. 319.

intends. *Cape Fear Rising* also restates Waddell's account of the defense of black prisoners at the jail, although Sam is among those who note the hypocrisy of preventing a lynching hours after directing a mob in the senseless murder of dozens of African Americans. As the violence unfolds, MacRae and Taylor assume command of the Wilmington Light Infantry, because the commander refuses to take part in mob violence. Their ability to command the infantry reflects their control over the day's events. Ultimately, MacRae controls the extent of the violence. When Taylor declares that a black man who negotiates the release of white prisoners will face a firing squad for "[i]nciting insurrection," MacRae overrules his co-conspirator, revealing his plan to banish leading blacks and white Fusionists. Gerard concludes that between 120 and 150 African Americans were killed in the riot, offering a much more violent interpretation than any other author. He places MacRae at the center of this bloodshed.

Cape Fear Rising inspired considerable local interest in the events of 1898. The *Wilmington Sunday Star-News* featured a front-page story on the novel, addressing the depictions of MacRae, Rountree, and Walker Taylor. Walker Taylor III and George Rountree III, prominent residents of Wilmington, commented on the novel. Taylor released a statement that the "book was one of many accounts of the riots and that the author had obviously done much research." He deflected attention from 1898 onto current problems in Wilmington and the need for racial harmony. Taylor later stated that the negative portrayal of his grandfather "displeased" him. Rountree had not read the novel, but he suggested that the leading men of Wilmington were products of their times: "There was a peculiar chemistry or dynamic then that I don't fully understand because I wasn't living it."⁵³ These men resisted overturning the traditional narrative first laid out by Democrats in the days after the riot. The opinions of the African American community were notably absent from this article, illustrating the persistence of white control over public memory of the event.

The editorial page of the *Wilmington Morning Star* offered a forum for debate on the book's value. Beejay Grob criticized Gerard's use of the historical figures without the permission or perspectives of the leading families of Wilmington. He suggested that *Cape Fear Rising* might simply offer Gerard's "biased account."⁵⁴ Fred McRee responded to this criticism by noting that no respect had ever been given to the victims of the riot and their descendants. He proposed that the novel could help "expose that festering sore of our collective local past to critical scrutiny, and learn; or *Cape Fear Rising* can, if we allow it to, help us lay to rest our dead – and our dread."⁵⁵ This closing reference suggests that the black community did not need Governor Broughton's reminder of the bloodshed in order to understand white vigilance. Inez Campbell-Eason, a descendant of one of Wilmington's black businessmen, illustrated that the city's cultural landscape had been marked to remember men who orchestrated the coup. She protested that the city had honored the memory of "a bigot and massacerer like (the first) Hugh MacRae with a park."⁵⁶ Although *Cape Fear Rising* did not usher in a new narrative of the riot, its publication did open a dialog in which African Americans participated.

⁵³ Whisnant, "Violent White Revolt," pg. 6A.

⁵⁴ Beejay Grob, "'98 'Riot' Book Biased, Made-Up," *Wilmington Morning Star*, February 19, 1994, pg. 6A.

⁵⁵ Fred McRee, "Cross the Divide," *Wilmington Morning Star*, February 28, 1994, pg. 6A.

⁵⁶ Inez Campbell-Eason, "Honor Victims," *Wilmington Morning Star*, February 22, 1994, pg. 6A.

The centennial events in Wilmington in 1998 reflected a growing desire to face the past, yet the 1898 Centennial Foundation discovered the difficulty of commemorating an event that still inspired heated debate and disagreement over the facts. The failure to reach a consensus during the ceremonies in 1998 revealed that the traditional story remained entrenched in certain circles.⁵⁷ Time and perspective provided by novelists and historians had only weakened the authority of the old narrative; the landscape remained marked by Waddell's narrative.

⁵⁷ McLaurin, "Commemorating," pg. 47, 50, 55.