



The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt

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Born on the eve of the Civil War, Charles W. Chesnutt grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina, a county seat of four or five thousand people, a once-bustling commercial center slipping into postwar decline. Poor, black, and determined to outstrip his modest beginnings and forlorn surroundings, Chesnutt kept a detailed record of his thoughts, observations, and activities from his sixteenth through his twenty-fourth year (1874-1882). These journals, printed here for the first time, are remarkable for their intimate account of a gifted young black man's dawning sense of himself as a writer in the nineteenth century.

Though he achieved literary success in his time, Chesnutt has only recently been rediscovered and his contribution to American literature given its due. The only known private diary from a nineteenth-century African American author, these pages offer a fascinating glimpse into Chesnutt's everyday experience as he struggled to win the goods of education in the world of the post-Civil War South. An extraordinary portrait of the self-made man beset by the urgencies and difficulties of self-improvement in a racially discriminatory society, Chesnutt's journals unfold a richly detailed local history of postwar North Carolina. They also show with great force how the world of the postwar South obstructed--and, unexpectedly, assisted--a black man of driving intellectual ambitions.

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