

**Racial Prejudice in Post-Civil War America:  
Historical Realism in Charles Chesnutt's *The Colonel's Dream*  
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**Abstract**

This paper aims to shed light on the racial prejudice and violence of Post-Civil War America throughout critical analysis of Charles Chesnutt's novel *The Colonel's Dream*. Chesnutt's novel does not only represent an attempt to criticize the racial history of white Americans, but an attempt to dissolve the color line in the South to achieve equality between the people of different races. The incessant racist practices of the whites in the South, Chesnutt implies, will only lead to destruction, and consequently hinder the dream of success and prosperity of the American people. Chesnutt suggests throughout his novel that amalgamation in the South or moving to Northern free-slavery states are solutions to achieve social, economic and political equality between blacks and whites .

**Keywords**

Racial prejudice, American Civil War, Charles Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*

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**التحيز العنصري بعد الحرب الأهلية الأمريكية:  
الواقعية التاريخية في رواية تشارليز تشيزنت حلم العقيد  
نوح إبراهيم صالح الغزو  
الملخص**

يهدف هذا البحث إلى إلقاء الضوء على التحيز العنصري والعنف بعد الحرب الأهلية في أمريكا من خلال تحليل ناقد لرواية تشارليز تشيزنت حلم العقيد. رواية تشيزنت لا تمثل فقط محاولة إنتقاد للتاريخ العنصري للأمريكان البيض وإنما أيضا محاولة إزالة حاجز اللون في الجنوب من أجل تحقيق المساواة بين الناس من مختلف الأعراق. تشيزنت يلمح إلى أن الممارسات العنصرية للبيض في الجنوب سوف تقود فقط إلى الدمار وبالتالي إعاقة حلم النجاح والإزدهار للشعب الأمريكي. بناء عليه فإن تشيزنت يقترح من خلال روايته أن الإتحاد في الجنوب أو الإنتقال إلى الولايات الشمالية الخالية من العبودية تمثل حلول لتحقيق المساواة الإجتماعية والإقتصادية والسياسية بين الشعب الأبيض والأسود.

**الكلمات المفتاحية**

التحيز العنصري، الحرب الأهلية الأمريكية، تشارليز تشيزنت، حلم العقيد

*The Colonel's Dream* was written by the African American Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932) as a reaction to the tyranny and prejudice that was practiced against the blacks in Post-Civil War America. During this time when the African Americans were under constant threat of lynching by the White Americans in the South, Chesnutt was writing for "a high holy purpose" (Ferguson, Selected Writings 428) because of his belief in the power of literature to bridge the gap between whites and blacks and to create better understanding between the people of different races. Cynthia Lehman also affirms: "In terms of the work of Charles Chesnutt, his inspiration for literature was to change the perceptions that White Americans had toward Black Americans. In doing so, Chesnutt hoped to contribute to the development of a society based upon the principles of equality, harmony, justice, and peace" (284-85). In light of his stated purpose, Chesnutt's novel *The Colonel's Dream* presents an attempt to reform the South by creating a white philanthropist character, Colonel French, who spares no effort to make reformation possible. However, the racial discrimination that dominated the South and which Chesnutt describes throughout his novel hinders this dream. Accordingly, the story of Chesnutt portrays the hopelessness of reforming the Southern town of Clarendon, North Carolina with the incessant racist practices in the town .

*The Colonel's Dream* examines the problems of the Southern society that resulted out of the racial ideologies of the white Americans after the American Civil War in which "the white man ... insisted upon racial purity and prided himself upon the greatness of the Anglo-Saxon race" (Soken 55). Therefore, the social, economic, and educational problems of the black Americans were a result of the white man's prejudices and it is because of this prejudice that intermingling between races became impossible within a racist society. Sandra Govan explains that "to whites, mixed blood signified 'physical and moral degeneracy and bastardy'; a person with mixed blood was an 'unnatural racial hybrid.' Among Afro-Americans, persons of mixed blood were frequently viewed with suspicion or disdain" (206). Therefore, the violence and racial attitudes of the white Americans are described throughout Chesnutt's

novel as exploiting the blacks as laborers in the fields by enacting the convict labor that keeps the black people indebted to the whites. As a reaction to the oppression that the whites practice against the blacks, Colonel French starts a noble mission in the South to stop the white people's continuous evil behaviors against the innocent blacks as an attempt to create a peaceful society in which all people respect one another regardless of their races. The mission of Colonel French in the South is synonymous to the mission of Chesnutt who "was involved heavily with social and political causes within the Black community in Cleveland (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], civic organizations, protests against racial discrimination and prejudice" (Lehman 276) in the period between 1906 and 1915. However, this noble mission proves to be a failure because miscegenation or mixed-race marriage was prohibited in the South. Accordingly, Chesnutt suggests throughout *The Colonel's Dream* "that the equality of mankind and the meaninglessness of race should be the criteria of humanness" (Soken 55) in order to solve the problem of race in Post-Civil War America .

In *The Colonel's Dream*, Chesnutt creates a white pacifist character who works to bring reformation to Clarendon as an attempt to make the whites and the blacks live together in a society not dominated by racial discrimination. Although Colonel French was taking a vacation to the South for only three months, his nostalgia to the past and feelings of duty toward the South made him stay in Clarendon and start his journey of reformation. The story of French says:

The town needed an element, which he could in a measure supply by residing there, if for only a few weeks each year. And that element was some point of contact with the outer world and its more advanced thought. He might induce some of his Northern friends to follow his example; there were many for whom the mild climate in winter and the restful atmosphere at all seasons of the year, would be a boon which correctly informed people by eager to enjoy. (Chesnutt 84)

The optimistic view of Colonel French that he would be able to change the miserable situation of the South by encouraging other people to join him in his philanthropist endeavors causes him to feel

hopeful about the future. Furthermore, the financial independence of French along with the consensus that he thought would receive from the public makes him feel that change in Clarendon could be possible.

The first thing that Colonel French did when he arrived in Clarendon was supporting the relationship between his son, Phil, and the old black man, Peter, in which their relationship in the beginning seemed to represent an ideal relationship between blacks and whites. Chesnutt affirms that intermingling between white and black people guarantees the abolition of racism in the South. He says: "I ... believe that the mixture of races will in time become an accomplished fact" (Andrews 141). In this context, it is important to notice that Chesnutt "stated quite forthrightly that total assimilation was the only solution to the race problem" (Soken 52). French is represented as a white philanthropist who spares no effort to make mingling between whites and blacks possible, and thereby achieve equality between people of different races. French also shows sympathy toward old Peter who carries with him the long years of oppression that the blacks suffered as a result of racism and decides to counter the racial ideologies of the whites.

The kindness of old Peter and his loyalty to the dead people of his family caused Colonel French to feel shameful about the bad treatment of some whites to the blacks who consider themselves first-class citizens in Southern America. It is important to notice here that Chesnutt had the belief that race is "a modern invention of the white people to perpetuate the color line" (Chesnutt, "Essays" 232). Therefore, Chesnutt is suggesting throughout his novel that the white people oppressed the blacks not because they had better flesh or blood, but because they had the power that they used against the weak innocents by exploiting them to attain wealth. As a result, the purpose of the mission of Colonel French in Clarendon appears to elevate the whites by stopping their inhumane practices against the innocent people. Chesnutt says about Colonel French in his novel: "He wants to do something to offset Fetters and his kind, who were preying upon the weaknesses of the people" (110). Accordingly, the mission of Colonel French represents a noble mission that aims to

stop the evil actions of the whites; thereby, peace and love will expand among all classes and races in society .

Colonel French demonstrates the fact that racism brings nothing but hatred between people of different races, so he avoids making distinction between people according to their color or origin. On the contrary, he believes that all people whether black or white have equal rights and they all shared the same history, but the greed of some whites was the reason that caused the social and economic problems in the South. The Colonel says: “White and colored children studied the same books in different schools. White and black people rode on the same trains in separate cars. Living side by side, and meeting day by day, the law, made and administered by white men, had built a wall between them” (Chesnutt 250). Therefore, the Colonel condemns the white people to be responsible for the miserable situation of the blacks in the South whom he considers as victims of those who wanted to achieve power and wealth.

*The Colonel's Dream* alludes that the hatred the black people construct against the whites is a result of the evil system that the whites espouse. The hatred that Bud Johnson had against the white people that led him to shoot two white people was a result of long years of oppression and dehumanization. The continuous cruelty of the whites leads to nothing but death and destruction that emerge as a result of the black people's resistance of the brutal white system. The longing of Bud Johnson for freedom was encountered by considering him as vagrant according to the rules of whiteness that resulted in strife between him and the whites. The trial of Bud Johnson goes as this: “‘Bud Johnson,’ said the justice, ‘you are charged with escaping from the service into which you were sold to pay the fine and costs on a charge of vagrancy. What do you plead – guilty or not guilty?’” (Chesnutt 63). This harsh scene that describes the injustice of the law that empowers the whites at the expense of the blacks shows the chaotic situation that the whites created in the South. This chaos caused Colonel French to feel guilty about what his race did and decides that he should do something to expunge the shame of whiteness .

The struggle of the white people to perpetuate the color line shows

their stubbornness to continue the evil practices that they take against the blacks. Chesnutt says: "The color line in Clarendon, as in all Southern towns, was, on the surface at least, rigidly drawn, and extended from the cradle to the grave" (249). It is important to note here that Chesnutt parodies the white man's ignorance in which the skin color is taken as a factor that hinders colored people from feeling free in their society. He asserts the fact that "if it is only by becoming white that colored people and their children are to enjoy the rights and dignities of citizenship, they will have every incentive to 'lighten the breed' ... so that they may claim the white man's privileges as soon as possible" (Andrews 142). This quotation demonstrates the common belief that the black people are deprived of their rights only because they have skin color different from the whites. Consequently, Chesnutt exposes the cruelty of slavery by suggesting that it becomes ridiculous when the skin color is taken as a factor to determine whether a person can attain his/her rights in society or not .

In the beginning of his relationship with old Peter, little Phil is introduced in *The Colonel's Dream* as having much in common with Colonel French in which he never questions his father that old Peter has different color from them. Phil never seemed to have a feeling of superiority over old Peter because of his color, and that made it easy for him to build strong relationship with the old man, "Little Phil was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone ... Little Phil had a sweet temper, loving disposition, and endeared himself to all with whom he came in contact" (Chesnutt 20). Henry B. Wonham explains that "'amalgamation' of the races will bring an inevitable and desirable end to racial identification, including the myth of white purity that undergirds American racism" (831). Therefore, it seems that when Chesnutt introduces us to the successful relationship between Phil and old Peter, he is aware that racial amalgamation is the way to dissolve the color line that causes strife between blacks and whites . Chesnutt suggests throughout his novel that the only way to stop the oppression that the whites practice against the blacks is to resist "the hegemony of white supremacy" (Knadler 428), and therefore achieve equality between blacks and whites. Williams Andrews affirms that

“the only way to eradicate this prejudice was, in Chesnutt’s view, to eradicate the ‘racial differences’ – social, economic, political, and physical – which perpetuated the prejudice and kept whites separate from blacks” (141). The social interaction between blacks and whites that is based on respect and equal rights guarantees that racial discrimination will come to an end. This social interaction aims to achieve goodness not only for blacks but also for whites in which no race may have a feeling of superiority over the other. However, the white people’s attempt to perpetuate the past history of their ancestors that had no moral values creates racial conflict and hatred between people in the society. The bloody past of the whites caused death and pain for many innocents for long years and some whites appear to be fascinated and proud of their bloody history and attempt to perpetuate it .

Childhood represents a stage of innocence and hope that is usually associated with the promise of a better future. In *The Colonel’s Dream*, the return of Colonel French to Clarendon with his son, Phil, who appears to be pacifist and lovely, gives hope that the racial ideologies of the white people in the South are going to be abolished. Ryan Simmons argues that “the novel seems to valorize Childhood” (121) and this gives the impression that change always comes at the hands of the new generations that carry no racial attitudes. However, the brutality of the white people and their struggle to perpetuate the free-market in the South leads Chesnutt to believe that change under the current situation of oppression and slavery cannot be attainable; therefore, the death of Phil along with Peter as a result of being hit by a railcar leads to the failure of the dream of Colonel French .

The end of the story with death shows that the dream of equality between blacks and whites could not be fulfilled at the current moment. However, this does not lead to the death of hope that is the main goal of Chesnutt’s writing. Simmons affirms that “the effects of the novel’s ending ... might be equally striking emotionally but would not mean as much had Chesnutt failed to prepare his readers in the three hundred previous pages to understand them more fully” (7). Although the dream of equality between whites and blacks fails in Chesnutt’s novel, it would be of great significance to understand that the reasons that lead to the success of this dream were not

fulfilled. Despite the fact that Colonel French was financially independent, he never got consensus from the public to help achieve his goal. Dean McWilliams demonstrates the fact that “the silence of the ‘best people,’ the former aristocrats and the educated members of the middle class on whom French has counted, signals their complicity in this resistance to change” (177). Accordingly, the failure of Colonel French to bring reformation to Clarendon is very much associated with the resistance of whiteness to accept change. The white people never supported Colonel French in his endeavors to expunge slavery in the South and never accepted to stop the convict labor they adopt to retain power over the blacks .

The friendly relationship between Phil and old Peter could be considered as the only change that occurred in Clarendon after the arrival of Colonel French though it did not last for a long time because Phil starts to show signs of disrespect to old Peter which was immediately followed by their death. Phil never calls old Peter by racial epithets or shows any signs of disrespect at the beginning of their relationship. On the contrary, Phil feels very close to old Peter and starts to call him “uncle” to show respect. William Gleason affirms the fact that “amalgamation of the races was not only likely, but desirable” (237). It is also important to note here that “he [Chesnutt] deems racial amalgamation absolutely necessary in order to rid the country of the racial discord and strife with which a composite and homogeneous people would not have to contend” (Ferguson, “Rena Walden” 75). Therefore, Colonel French appears to be very much aware that to bring reformation to the South, he should encourage amalgamation between whites and blacks. Consequently, when he started to call old Peter “uncle”, his child immediately learned that he should imitate his father .

In the first meeting in the cemetery, the first sentence that Colonel French says to old Peter is “howdy do, uncle” (Chesnutt 24). Later on, we find that Phil says to his father that old Peter must be a member of their family because his father calls him “uncle”. Phil says: “He must be kin to us; he has the same name, and belongs to the same family, and you know you called him ‘uncle’” (Chesnutt 25). Although Phil is still a young boy, his behaviors seem to be of

an adult, especially in his relationship with Peter. When he first meets old Peter, Phil does not ask his father why old Peter has skin color different from them, and because of that it could be impossible for them to belong to the same family. Accordingly, the milieu in which the child grows up plays crucial role in constructing his personality that affects his relationship with others. Chesnutt seems to be suggesting throughout the novel that when a white child is taught to keep away from black people and never to mingle with them, this will create social problems that will extend to future generations. On the other side, when the white family encourages children to mingle with people of other races and treat them in a respectful manner, this will help in destroying the color line that the black people suffered from for long years .

This affirms the fact that parents play essential role in constructing the identity of their children. In other words, Phil would never have addressed old Peter “uncle”, if he did not hear his father do so. Therefore, the novel seems to be implying that family plays a very significant role in abolishing the ideas of racism and criticizes those who take the skin color as a factor to judge whether a person is good or bad. The new generations of the white people in the South were not born with racial ideologies and feelings of superiority over other races, but they acquired these ideologies from their families and society. As a result, it would be of great significance to destroy the racial attitudes of the whites in Post-Civil War America by teaching the new generations about the destructive role that racial prejudice plays in society .

Before the arrival of Colonel French in Clarendon, old Peter was not allowed to have friendly relationship with whites. The treatment of the Colonel to old Peter in a respectful manner promised a hopeful future if he succeeded in his dream of reformation. Matthew Wilson states that old Peter becomes the “guardian of the Colonel’s son” (174). The fact that old Peter becomes a guardian of Phil gives him a kind of respect to be treated in a courteous manner. Accordingly, with the arrival of Colonel French and Phil to the South, old Peter is provided protection from the convict labor and the slavery system that the whites enacted to ensure payless laborers in the plantations and at the same time, it protects him from the seclusion that he

suffered from at the hands of whiteness .

One of the reasons that leads to the failure of French in his noble mission in reforming the Southern town of Clarendon and which Chesnutt implies in his novel is the fact that French depends more on his material power to abolish the racial problems in the South rather than working to achieve support from the public to succeed in his mission. Chesnutt says: "Colonel French might have money, but he, Fetters, had men as well" (214). This suggests that Colonel French failed in his mission because he wanted to achieve many things at the same time while only depending on his money to abolish slavery in the South. This leads to raise the question: "Could an enlightened and fair-minded white man, blessed with economic power and moral influence, help the Southern black man win what he could not achieve alone?" (Andrews 224). Therefore, the only contribution that Colonel French made to the Southern black society was providing material support rather than working to attain consensus from the public to reform the South .

Colonel French attempts to create a new white Southern man who believes in equality between people of different races. Despite the fact that the beginnings of the relationship between Phil and old Peter was hopeful, but when Phil changes in which he starts to resist old Peter who is considered his guardian, little Phil appears to be influenced by the racial ideologies in the South. Therefore, Chesnutt hints that equality between black and white people seems to be impossible without establishing social ties between races. Andrews says:

The melting pot had served the interests of all other racial and national groups who sought to merge into the American mainstream. Absorption via social intermingling and intermarriage seemed to Chesnutt the only demonstrable means by which fundamental race prejudice could be wiped out permanently so that the nonwhite population could be free to obtain the rights and opportunities of the American Dream. (142)

Accordingly, the capitalist practices of the whites in Post-Civil War America contradict the ideals of the American Dream that believe in freedom for all Americans. Therefore, Chesnutt seems to be

suggesting that the American Dream of individualism and freedom appears to be very much associated with the success in achieving equality between blacks and whites .

Old Peter finds solace in his relationship with Phil after the long days of slavery and oppression. The harsh picture that *The Colonel's Dream* draws to the suffering of an old black man within unjust society is to show the consequences of oppression that the black people suffered at the hands of whites. Chesnutt argues in his novel: "Peter had returned home poor and broken, not because he had been free, but because nature first, and society next, in distributing their gifts, had been niggardly with old Peter" (29). Therefore, it is important to note here that Old Peter has never been called "uncle" except by Colonel French and Phil because blacks were denied the addresses that were given to whites. Chesnutt says :

Little Phil had grown very fond of old Peter, who seemed to lavish upon the child all of his love and devotion for the dead generations of the French family. The colonel had taught Phil to call the old man 'Uncle Peter,' after the kindly Southern fashion of slavery days, which, denying to Negroes the forms of address applied to white people, found in the affectionate terms of relationship – Mammy, Auntie and Uncle – designations that recognized the respect due to age, and yet lost, when applied to slaves, their conventional significance. (135)

French believes in the fact that the South could only achieve prosperity when the capitalist system that is enacted by the whites is annulled. Unlike the other white capitalists in Clarendon who hold racial attitudes, French was able to make fortune without transforming into a vampire that feeds on others. Therefore we can see that "the colonel had prospered because, having no Peters to work for him, he had been compelled to work for himself" (Chesnutt 29). Thus, the time that French spent away from Clarendon made him believe that reformation could only be possible throughout challenging the racial behaviors of some whites. Socken explains that "Chesnutt advocated Negro emigration to the North as a first step to the solution of the race problem" (54). Wilson also argues: "In contrast to most of the inhabitants of Clarendon, Colonel French sees the economic benefits of the abolishment of slavery and thinks of himself as freed from the historical consequences of that slavery"

(164). In other words, Chesnut believes that moving to Northern free-slavery states could be one solution to the racist system that the whites adopted in the South .

The death story of Phil and old Peter suggests that when a relationship between white and black people becomes dominated by racial ideologies it does not last for long time. The continuous meetings of Phil and old Peter in the graveyard, which symbolizes death, give the story gloomy and dark atmosphere in which most of the dialogues between Phil and old Peter focus on death rather than life and hope. The engagement of a little boy in speeches about death makes the dream of Colonel French appear to be unrealistic. Phil seems to be very much concerned about the place of his burial along with old Peter rather than focusing on the idea of growing up to change the racial ideologies that have dominated the South for long time. Chesnut narrates the story of Phil:

Little Phil then proceeded to greater detail. 'Here,' he said, 'next to my grandfather, will be your place, and here next to that, will be mine, and here, and here next to me will be – but no,' he said pausing reflectively, 'that ought to be saved for my little boy when he grows up and dies, that is, when I grow up and have a little boy and he grows up and grows old and dies and leaves a little boy and – but where will uncle Peter be?' 'Nem mine me, honey,' said the old man, 'dey can put me somewhar e'se. Hit doan' mattuh 'bout me.' 'No, Uncle Peter, you must be here with the rest of us. For you know, Uncle Peter, I'm so used to you now, that I should want to be near me then'''. (136-37)

Throughout the speeches of little Phil, old Peter is never given the chance to express his desire if he wants to be buried somewhere else. It seems that little Phil is giving an order to the old man to be buried where he wants him to be. Furthermore, Little Phil never asks old Peter if he had a family that he wants to be buried close to or if likes the idea of being buried in a cemetery that is arranged for white people only. This speech by Phil leads to raise questions about the real intentions behind ordering the old black man to be buried near him, and whether this order aims to efface the color line that spread in the South by having one cemetery for black and white people or because he just wants old Peter to be near him!

The good behaviors of old Peter demonstrate the fact that he is a noble man who lives in an unjust and racist society. The scene in which old Peter tries to save little Phil from being hit by a rail car shows that the skin color should not be taken as a factor to judge people. Gary Scharnhorst affirms the fact that “Peter is a more noble figure, transcending the comic or pathetic stereotype. He vainly attempts to rescue Phil from a moving rail car” (279). Old Peter works as a father figure for little Phil in which he never hesitates to sacrifice his life to save the white child regardless of the oppression of whiteness. In other words, old Peter expected nothing in return when he attempted to rescue the child from the accident, but he was motivated by his good character. Therefore, Chesnutt seems to question the arrogance of the whites in the South who treat black people as inferior while the actions of the blacks prove them to have better hearts than the whites themselves.

The death of Phil and old Peter as a result of a rail car accident turns the events of the novel into completely different trajectory that leads in the end to the failure of Colonel French in his plans of reformation. *The Colonel's Dream* presents Colonel French as responsible for the death of Phil and old Peter because of neglecting his role as a father and reformer:

Had he not sent old Peter into the house, the child would not have been left alone. Had he kept his eye upon Phil until Peter's return the child would not have strayed away. He had neglected his child, while the bruised and broken old black man in the room below had given his life to save him. He could do nothing now to show the child his love or Peter his gratitude, and the old man had neither wife nor child in whom the colonel's bounty might find an object. But he would do what he could. He would lay his child's body in the old family lot in the cemetery, among the bones of his ancestors, and there too, close at hand, old Peter should have honorable sepulcher. It was his due, and would be the fulfillment of little Phil's last request. (Chesnutt 248)

This quotation shows that the only reward that Colonel French can provide in response to all the services that old Peter did by taking care of Phil is to build him an “honorable sepulcher” in the cemetery near his son. The short time in which Phil and old Peter get separated by order from Colonel French caused the death of both. Furthermore,

the fact in which Colonel French expresses his desire to reward old Peter by building him a sepulcher in the white cemetery only fulfills the desire of Phil who wanted old Peter to be near him .

Chesnutt's novel shows that the death of Phil was considered by some of the white racist characters as heavenly punishment for Colonel French who was regarded as "enemy of his race" (Chesnutt 258). The whites rejected the idea that old Peter is being considered as equal to a white man, and therefore they looked at the death of Phil and old Peter as the end of danger that was threatening their race. Simmons states that "the later novel's deaths are important primarily in how they are interpreted: French's enemy Fetters claims that Phil's death is a 'judgment on' French" (118). Therefore, the death of Phil and old Peter represents the failure of a relationship between white boy and black man in a racist society in which their place of burial becomes also subject of dispute .

The fact that Colonel French realizes that even fulfilling the wish of his son by burying old Peter near him becomes unattainable makes his dream appear to be imaginary with the continuous brutality of whiteness. The whites consider burying a black man in their cemetery as an insult in which they struggle to preserve their position of power over the blacks; therefore, the approval on burying old Peter in the cemetery of whites will symbolize equality between the whites and the blacks. Chesnutt says: "No Negro's body had ever profaned the sacred soil of Oak Cemetery. The Protestants laid the matter before the cemetery trustees, and a private meeting was called in the evening to consider the proposed interment" (249). This proves the fact that blacks were denied their rights of humanness in Post-Civil War America to the point that they were not allowed to be buried in the cemetery of whites .

The ghastly scene that describes the exhumation of the body of old Peter and removing it from Oak Cemetery proves the stubbornness of whites and their racial prejudices. Wilson affirms the fact that "neither poor nor upper-class whites ... are willing to relinquish the ideology of racism" (177). The failure of Colonel French in burying old Peter and Phil in the same cemetery foreshadows his failure in bringing reformation to the South. The fact that racial radicalism

extends to the dead leads Colonel French to relinquish his dream of reformation, especially after the harsh letter of the whites that was sent to him after exhuming the body of old Peter. The letter says: "Kurnell French: Take notis, Berry yore ole nigger somewhar else. He can't stay in Oak Semitury. The majority of the white people of this town, who dident tend yore nigger funarl, woant have him there. Niggers by there selves, white peepul by there selves, and them that lives in our town must bide by our rules" (268). This quotation supports the idea that the racial practices of the whites extend to the dead people in which they remove the body of the old black man from Oak Cemetery, which is a place of burial for whites only. Therefore, "Chesnutt reminds us that the identity of African-Americans cannot be separated from the inglorious history of slavery" (White 88). Accordingly, Chesnutt's novel represents "an authentic effort to 'articulate the past historically'" (Kotzin 70) throughout reminding us with the brutality of slavery .

The action of exhuming the dead body of old Peter shows that Colonel French did not only fail to better the life of the blacks and free them from the oppression of whiteness, but he also failed in reforming the whites to abandon the immoral practices of slavery. Wilson affirms the fact that "French discovers that white southerners are incapable of being elevated; furthermore, Chesnutt illustrates in this novel how notions of instrumental reform will inevitably be steamrolled by irrational forces unleashed by racial radicalism" (176). When Colonel French realizes that his dream is unattainable in the South as long as the whites insist on their racial ideologies, he leaves Clarendon along with his dead people to bury them in a cemetery in the North. Scharnhorst explains that

Chesnutt depicts the cowardice of the mob that exhumes Peter's coffin under cover of darkness. This sordid and brutal event at once triggers French's departure from Clarendon and signals ... the collapse of his philanthropic schemes ... The colonel takes 'his dead to the North' and reburies Peter and Phil 'in a beautiful cemetery' overlooking New York harbor, where there is none to question old Peter's presence or the colonel's right to lay them there. (279)

The immoral behavior of the white people by desecrating the grave of the old black man shows the evil practices of whiteness even

against dead people. Therefore, by taking the dead people to be buried in the North implies that Chesnutt is looking at the North as an ideal place, where the hope of social, economic, and political equality existed .

Despite the deaths that occur in the novel and the failure of Colonel French in his mission of reformation, it would be questionable to build the future of a whole race on the dream of a single white man. Colonel French would not be given credit for renouncing his dream of reforming the South just after the death of Phil and old Peter. The fact that Colonel French gives up his dream does not mean that there will be no other philanthropists who will come to take his place and destroy the racial prejudices of the whites. Chesnutt explains:

For no more now than when the Man of Sorrows looked out over the Mount of Olives, can men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles. The seed which the colonel sowed seemed to fall by the wayside, it is true; but other eyes have seen with the same light, and while Fetters and his kind still dominate their section, other hands have taken up the fight which the colonel dropped. (280)

This quotation from *The Colonel's Dream* shows that Chesnutt appears to be hopeful about the future regardless of the failure of Colonel French in his endeavors of reformation. The purpose of Chesnutt's writing is not to highlight scenes of despair, but rather to prove that the miserable situation of the black people in the South will come to an end with the continuous philanthropist actions of people who have the power to change. White affirms that "for Chesnutt, however, literature was more than balm; in fact, he believed that the written word could be a social and moral force, a lethal weapon for change" (87) .

Chesnutt believes that whenever white people realize the dangers of racism on society, the current situation of the South will change. The failure of Colonel French proves the fact that his efforts to reform the South were individual and not systematic. When Colonel French arrived in Clarendon, he did not make a systematic plan to succeed in his mission of bringing freedom to the oppressed blacks. He also claimed that he will invite his friends in the North to

join him in his philanthropist practices, but this never happens in the novel and that caused his dream of reformation to become unrealistic. Colonel French worked on a very narrow scope in a society filled up with racism and lack of ethics; therefore, his mission of reformation proved to be a failure. In other words, Chesnutt is trying to say that public consensus is significant to efface the racial ideologies in Post-Civil War America .

The fact that the differences between whites and blacks were socially constructed in which the fears from the blacks arriving to power caused distance and less social interactions between people of the same community make the reformation possible if these social barriers were removed. McWilliams argues that

Chesnutt's faith in the salvation of our society by the eventual arrival of the Future American is grounded on at least two assumptions. It assumes, first of all, that differences between white and black Americans are not based in genetic inheritance but in social and economic class distinctions. It further assumes that white and black Americans will recognize the illusory nature of these distinctions and choose to efface them through assimilation. (53)

McWilliams confirms the fact that Chesnutt does not want to present a desperate outlook about the future in which he predicts that change will become real one day where all people will have equal rights in society. The first assumption that McWilliams presents demonstrates the fact that the racist ideologies of the whites were socially constructed throughout the acceptance of the white man's race as superior and the black race as inferior .

The racial ideologies of the whites regarding the supremacy of their race over other races resulted in many social and ethical problems in the American society after the Civil War. Chesnutt believes that these social and ethical problems should be destroyed; thereby, we become able to attain equality and freedom in a peaceful society. *The Colonel's Dream* ends up with the belief that there will always be hope, and therefore we continue to pray because we believe in peace and freedom. Chesnutt says: "But there are those who hope, and those who pray, that this condition will pass, that someday our whole land will be truly free, and the strong will cheerfully help to bear the burdens of the weak, and Justice, the seed,

and Peace, the flower, of liberty, will prevail throughout all our burdens" (281). Accordingly, this affirms the fact that regardless of the failure of Colonel French, other philanthropist people will show up to challenge the inhumane practices of the slavery system in the South .

In conclusion, *The Colonel's Dream* does not only aim to describe the miserable situation of the blacks and their suffering at the hands of immoral people, but it also aims to provide solutions to the social and economic problems in the South through creating social ties between blacks and whites and eliminating the white man's prejudices. The failure of Colonel French in reforming the South provides an example for other philanthropists who strive to live in a peaceful society not dominated by racial ideologies. It would be of great significance to notice that the public support is one of the crucial requirements to stop the evil practices of the whites in the South. Colonel French did not work to achieve the support of the public or even to empower the black people, and therefore his dream proved to be a failure

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