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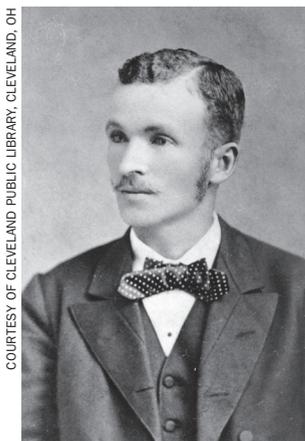
Lumbee Identity in Charles Chesnutt's *Mandy Oxendine*

by Erica Abrams Locklear

In 1902, Charles Waddell Chesnutt published a piece in *The Southern Workman*, the publication of the Hampton Normal Institute, entitled “The Free Colored People of North Carolina.” In this essay, he questions the racial authenticity of a group of Native Americans in southeast North Carolina who then identified themselves as Croatan Indians but now identify as Lumbee Indians:

Some years ago these mixed Indians and Negroes were recognized by the North Carolina legislature as “Croatan Indians,” being supposed to have descended from a tribe of that name and the whites of the lost first white colony of Virginia. They are allowed, among other special privileges conferred by this legislation, to have separate schools of their own, being placed, in certain other respects, upon a plane somewhat above that of the Negroes and a little below that of the whites.¹

As suggested in this passage, Chesnutt questioned Lumbee claims to Native American ancestry, apparently objecting to the fact that the group had secured separate schools apart from both white and black children and had, in Chesnutt’s view, consequently risen in the racial hierarchy of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.



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TOP The Howard School, where Charles W. Chesnutt served as principal, 1880–83 (Founded in 1867, in 1877 the Howard School was selected to become the first State Colored Normal School to educate African American teachers, and in 1947, it became Fayetteville State Teacher’s College, then Fayetteville State University in 1969.)

BOTTOM Charles Waddell Chesnutt at age 25, the end of his time as the headmaster of the Howard School

¹ Charles W. Chesnutt, “The Free Colored People of North Carolina,” *Southern Workman* 31.3 (1902): 139; subsequently cited parenthetically.

Since Lumbee Indians have undergone several name changes since 1885, for ease of reference I will refer to them as Lumbee throughout this article unless otherwise indicated. Also, in this article, I use the terms Indian and Native American interchangeably since Lumbee Indians have referred to themselves as Indian since 1783 and also identify as Native American.