

Annotations essay

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



Summary (Chapters 1 to 16) of The American Fugitive in Europe

Summary

The American Fugitive in Europe is a presentation of the accounts of American abolitionist William Wells Brown on his experiences in travelling to Europe. An emancipated slave, Wells Brown has become notable for his anti-slavery lectures and known to be one of the most influential abolitionists of his time. The departure of Wells Brown from the United States (US) to the United Kingdom (UK) in 1849 came as a circumstance for him to spread his lectures abroad. Yet, the prolonged stay of Wells Brown abroad came resulting from his sudden label as a fugitive. Wells Brown thus wrote said book as a matter of documenting all his annotations on his travels in Europe, most of which relate to abolitionism (Wells Brown, 1855).

Wells Brown departed for the UK in 1849 to deliver his scheduled lectures on anti-slavery. However, the following year saw Wells Brown confronting the necessity of staying in the UK longer than planned. When the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 went into passage, Wells Brown began seeing the prospect of his capture as a fugitive a forthcoming reality. The strong advocacy of Wells Brown against slavery, which he put into further action through his overseas lectures in Europe, placed him in danger of becoming a fugitive in the eyes of the US government. Furthermore, the success of Wells Brown in his lectures before the British people attributes to his shocking expositions of the realities of slavery in the US, particularly his outright rejection of the premise that African-Americans are inferior by way of their skin color (Wells Brown, 1855, pp. 35-50).

Wells Brown used his existing risk of being a fugitive to his advantage by travelling to several parts of Europe other than the UK to deliver his anti-slavery lectures. The desire of Wells Brown to learn more about different cultures in Europe led him to have an enriching experienced that enabled him to develop his advocacy against slavery further. At the same time, Wells Brown is aware that European societies tend to impose early education among citizens as a norm, compared to the inequalities eminent in the US provided by race. Wells Brown himself admitted that he felt left out because he did not receive early education in the US while he was still a slave. With that, Wells Brown recognized the importance of reading “ while others are asleep” for him and the rest of the people who share the same experience as his to “ catch up with the rest of the world” (Wells Brown, 1855, pp. 51-63). Despite being abroad, Wells Brown was not able to escape well from his critics. Visible opposition balanced the overwhelming support Wells Brown has received in delivering his anti-slavery lectures. The International Peace Conference held in Paris, France, for instance, was an event where Wells Brown encountered American slaveholders vehemently opposing his viewpoints against slavery. Nevertheless, Wells Brown did not back down on his continued opposition to slavery, to the extent that he started to use visual representations such as a slave collar to describe many atrocious acts done against African-American slaves in the US. Furthermore, the meeting of Wells Brown with the philosopher Thomas Dick in 1851 further strengthened his intellectual network of supporters he has built during his stay in Europe. Wells Brown considered Dick as an abolitionist whose works that combined

science and Christianity has duly supported his viewpoint on abolishing slavery (Wells Brown, 1855, pp. 64-192).

Not even a loose interpretation of the book under review could dispute the imminent fact that Wells Brown fervently opposed slavery. The fact that Wells Brown risked his status as a free man by travelling abroad to teach against the then-prevailing status quo in the US proved well that he had the intention to work towards freeing the rest of the African-Americans still held as slaves that time by deinstitutionalizing slavery. According to the view of Wells Brown, slavery does not hold any justifiable premise since racial features primarily described through skin color do not provide significant differentiations in terms of human capabilities. For Wells Brown, slavery brought nothing but sheer atrocity to African-Americans. The fact that there is sufficient proof signifying that African-Americans are capable humans like their white Americans is one aspect used by Wells Brown to defy slavery. The travels of Wells Brown across Europe brought him with wider perspectives that positively influenced his advocacy. The opportunity to understand different cultures – something that most white Americans favoring slavery did not have, provided Wells Brown a well-rounded mentality that enabled him to win over several supporters for his exposition of the cruelties of slavery in the US. Indeed, it is amenable to think that the timely passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 actually proved a helpful event for Wells Brown, since it encouraged him to tour around Europe more to widen his support base on anti-slavery through his lectures while escaping arrest. The participation of Wells Brown in notable events that time such as

the International Peace Conference in Paris, France further solidified his resolve to abolish slavery in the US.

Works Cited

Wells Brown, William. *The American Fugitive: Sketches of Places and People Abroad*. Boston, MA: John P. Jewett and Company, 1855. Print.