

Book review on a year in the south: 1865

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Lecturer Book Review: A Year in the South (1865) “A Year in the South” is a story of the encounters of four southerners, with the dying moments of the civil war. As the calendar turned to 1865, Louis Hughes, a Deep South slave; Samuel Agnew, Mississippi preacher and son of a prominent planter; Cornelia McDonald, a Virginia Confederate army wife and mother of seven; and John Robertson, an East Tennessee former Confederate soldier (Ash 11), each observed, and participated in, the final stages of the American civil war. During this war, a lot of people faced hardships and challenges. These four, however, caught it towards its end and experienced the upturn it had taken, with varying degrees of despair, hope, serenity, and relentlessness. The individual experiences of the four comes out in the form of a slave undergoing through a lot of misery, with his wife, in an attempt to gain freedom from a bullish owner; a widow of the war who works hard to battle her acquired life of poverty and despair; a spiritual man who juggles both spiritual and worldly troubles; and an ex-confederate soldier, young of age, seeking to acquire a new, spiritual life. “Through their ordeals, they have a common strength; family..,” (Ash 24).

Through the lives of the four southerners, Ash portrays the significance of family in such tough situations. For instance, Hughes, who was a slave, impressed at the salt works and was accorded an opportunity to conduct business during the war. The joy of this was, however, cut short by the abrupt end of the war (Ash 28). He and his wife were to rely on each other to come through the misery that followed the end of the civil war, as their owner turned violent, “...and refused to acknowledge the emancipation order,” (Ash 28). Only 18 years of age when the war came to an end.

However, he had experienced all the dangers and excitement, having served

as a confederate soldier in the war. He now only seeks to start a new life. However, he did not seek riches, nor adventure, "...what he thirsted for now was spiritual fulfillment" (Ash47). This he pursued through the help of his aunt and uncle.

Work Cited

Ash, Stephen V., *A Year in the South: Four Lives in 1865*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. ix + 289 pp.