



William Wells Brown: A Reader

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Born into slavery in Kentucky, William Wells Brown (1814-1884) was kept functionally illiterate until after his escape at the age of nineteen. Remarkably, he became the most widely published and versatile African American writer of the nineteenth century as well as an important leader in the abolitionist and temperance movements.

Brown wrote extensively as a journalist but was also a pioneer in other literary genres. His many groundbreaking works include *Clotel*, the first African American novel; *The Escape: or, A Leap for Freedom*, the first published African American play; *Three Years in Europe*, the first African American European travelogue; and *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, the first history of African American military service in the Civil War. Brown also wrote one of the most important fugitive slave narratives and a striking array of subsequent self-narratives so inventively shifting in content, form, and textual presentation as to place him second only to Frederick Douglass among nineteenth-century African American autobiographers.

Ezra Greenspan has selected the best of Brown's work in a range of fields including fiction, drama, history, politics, autobiography, and travel. The volume opens with an introductory essay that places Brown and his work in a cultural and political context. Each chapter begins with a detailed introductory headnote, and the contents are closely annotated; there is also a selected bibliography. This reader offers an introduction to the work of a major African American writer who was engaged in many of the important debates of his time.

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