

## American Novel : Case Study

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### Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe

#### Full Summary of the Novel

Having run up large debts, a Kentucky farmer named Arthur Shelby faces the prospect of losing everything he owns. Though he and his wife, Emily Shelby, have a kindhearted and affectionate relationship with their slaves, Shelby decides to raise money by selling two of his slaves to Mr. Haley, a coarse slave trader. The slaves in question are Uncle Tom, a middle-aged man with a wife and children on the farm, and Harry, the young son of Mrs. Shelby's maid Eliza. When Shelby tells his wife about his agreement with Haley, she is appalled because she has promised Eliza that Shelby would not sell her son.

However, Eliza overhears the conversation between Shelby and his wife and, after warning Uncle Tom and his wife, Aunt Chloe, she takes Harry and flees to the North, hoping to find freedom with her husband George in Canada. Haley pursues her, but two other Shelby slaves alert Eliza to the danger. She miraculously evades capture by crossing the half-frozen Ohio River, the boundary separating Kentucky from the North. Haley hires a slave hunter named Loker and his gang to bring Eliza and Harry back to Kentucky. Eliza and Harry make their way to a Quaker settlement, where the Quakers agree to help transport them to safety. They are joined at the settlement by George, who reunites joyously with his family for the trip to Canada.

Meanwhile, Uncle Tom sadly leaves his family and Mas'r George, Shelby's young son and Tom's friend, as Haley takes him to a boat on the Mississippi to be transported to a slave market. On the boat, Tom meets an angelic little white girl named Eva, who quickly befriends him. When Eva falls into the river, Tom dives in to save her, and her father, Augustine St. Clare, gratefully agrees to buy Tom from Haley. Tom travels with the St. Clares to their home in New Orleans, where he grows increasingly invaluable to the St. Clare household and increasingly close to Eva, with whom he shares a devout Christianity.

Up North, George and Eliza remain in flight from Loker and his men. When Loker attempts to capture them, George shoots him in the side, and the other slave hunters retreat. Eliza convinces George and the Quakers to bring Loker to the next settlement, where he can be healed. Meanwhile, in New Orleans, St. Clare discusses slavery with his cousin Ophelia, who opposes slavery as an institution but harbors deep prejudices against Black people. St. Clare, by contrast, feels no hostility against Black people but tolerates slavery because he feels powerless to change it. To help Ophelia overcome her bigotry, he buys Topsy, a young Black girl who was abused by her past master and arranges for Ophelia to begin educating her.

After Tom has lived with the St. Clares for two years, Eva grows very ill. She slowly weakens, then dies, with a vision of heaven before her. Her death has a profound effect on everyone who knew her: Ophelia resolves to love the slaves, Topsy learns to trust and feel attached to others, and St. Clare decides to set Tom free. However, before he can act on his decision, St. Clare is stabbed to death while trying to settle a brawl. As he dies, he at last finds God and goes to be reunited with his mother in heaven.

St. Clare's cruel wife, Marie, sells Tom to a vicious plantation owner named Simon Legree. Tom is taken to rural Louisiana with a group of new slaves, including Emmeline, whom the demonic Legree has purchased to use as a sex slave, replacing his previous sex slave Cassy. Legree takes a strong dislike to Tom when Tom refuses to whip a fellow slave as ordered. Tom receives a severe beating, and Legree resolves to crush his faith in God. Tom meets Cassy, and hears her story. Separated from her daughter by slavery, she became pregnant again but killed the child because she could not stand to have another child taken from her.

Around this time, with the help of Tom Loker—now a changed man after being healed by the Quakers—George, Eliza, and Harry at last cross over into Canada from Lake Erie and obtain their freedom. In Louisiana, Tom's faith is sorely tested by his hardships, and he nearly ceases to believe. He has two visions, however—one of Christ and one of Eva—which renew his spiritual strength and give him the courage to withstand Legree's torments. He encourages Cassy to escape. She does so, taking Emmeline with her, after she devises a ruse in which she and Emmeline pretend to be ghosts. When Tom refuses to tell Legree where Cassy and Emmeline have gone,

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Legree orders his overseers to beat him. When Tom is near death, he forgives Legree and the overseers. George Shelby arrives with money in hand to buy Tom's freedom, but he is too late. He can only watch as Tom dies a martyr's death.

Taking a boat toward freedom, Cassy and Emmeline meet George Harris's sister and travel with her to Canada, where Cassy realizes that Eliza is her long-lost daughter. The newly reunited family travels to France and decides to move to Liberia, the African nation created for former American slaves. George Shelby returns to the Kentucky farm, where, after his father's death, he sets all the slaves free in honor of Tom's memory. He urges them to think on Tom's sacrifice every time they look at his cabin and to lead a pious Christian life, just as Tom did.

## Character List

### Uncle Tom

A good and pious man, Uncle Tom is the protagonist of . Even under the worst conditions, Uncle Tom always prays to God and finds a way to keep his faith. As the novel progresses, the cruel treatment that Tom suffers at the hands of Simon Legree threatens his belief in God, but Tom withstands his doubts and dies the death of a Christian martyr.

### In-depth characterization of Uncle Tom

History has not been kind to Uncle Tom, the hero of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and one of the most popular figures of nineteenth-century American fiction. After its initial burst of sensational popularity and influence, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fell into neglect. Its circulation declined following the end of the Civil War and Stowe's death, and by the mid-1900s, the book was virtually out of print. Not until the early 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement reawakened an interest in anti-slavery fiction, did the novel again become widely read. More than a hundred years after its initial publication, however, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* stood as a testament to a past set of standards and expectations. The values and attributes that seemed admirable in its characters in 1852

frequently appeared incomprehensible and even contemptible to twentieth-century readers. In particular, the passive acceptance of slavery practiced by the novel's title character seemed horrendously out of line with the resolve and strength of modern Black Civil Rights crusaders. The term "Uncle Tom" became an insult, conjuring an image of an old Black man eager to please his white masters and happy to accept his own position of inferiority.

Although modern readers' criticisms hold some validity, the notion of an "Uncle Tom" contains generalizations not found within the actual character in the novel. First, Tom is not an old man. The novel states that he is eight years older than Shelby, which probably places him in his late forties at the start of the novel. Moreover, Tom does not accept his position of inferiority with happiness. Tom's passivity owes not to stupidity or to contentment with his position, but to his deep religious values, which impel him to love everyone and selflessly endure his trials. Indeed, Tom's central characteristic in the novel is this religiosity, his strength of faith. Everywhere Tom goes in the novel, he manages to spread some of the love and goodwill of his religious beliefs, helping to alleviate the pain of slavery and enhance the hope of salvation. And while this religiosity translates into a selfless passivity on Tom's part, it also translates into a policy of warm encouragement of others' attempts at freedom. Thus, he supports Eliza's escape, as well as that of Cassy and Emmeline from the Legree plantation. Moreover, while Tom may not actively seek his own freedom, he practices a kind of resistance in his passivity. When Legree orders him to beat the slave girl in Chapter XXXIII, he refuses, standing firm in his values. He will submit to being beaten for his beliefs, but he will not capitulate or run away.

Moreover, even in recognizing Tom's passivity in the novel, and Stowe's approving treatment of it, one should note that Stowe does not present this behavior as a model of *Black* behavior, but as a heroic model of behavior that should be practiced by everyone, Black and white. Stowe makes it very clear that if the villainous white slaveholders of the novel were to achieve Tom's selfless Christian love for others, slavery would be impossible, and Tom's death never would have happened. Because Stowe believes that a transformation through Christian love must occur before slavery can be abolished successfully, she holds up Tom's death as nobler than any escape, in that it provides an example for others and offers the hope of a more

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generalized salvation. Through this death, moreover, Tom becomes a Christ figure, a radical role for a Black character to play in American fiction in 1852. Tom's death proves Legree's fundamental moral and personal inferiority, and provides the motivating force behind George Shelby's decision to free all the slaves. By practicing selflessness and loving his enemy, Tom becomes a martyr and affects social change. Although contemporary society finds its heroes in active agents of social change and tends to discourage submissiveness, Stowe meant for Tom to embody noble heroic tendencies of his own. She portrayed his passivity as a virtue unconnected to his minority status. Within the world of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Tom is presented as more than a Black hero—he is presented as a hero transcending race.

### **Simon Legree**

Tom's ruthlessly evil master on the Louisiana plantation. A vicious, barbaric, and loathsome man, Legree fosters violence and hatred among his slaves.

### **Aunt Chloé**

Uncle Tom's wife and the Shelbys' cook. Chloe often acts like a jovial simpleton around the Shelbys to mask her more complex feelings.

### **Arthur Shelby**

The owner of Uncle Tom in Kentucky, Shelby sells Tom to the cruel Mr. Haley to pay off his debts. An educated, kind, and basically good-hearted man, Shelby nonetheless tolerates and perpetuates slavery. Stowe uses him to illustrate that the immorality inherent in slavery makes villains of all its practitioners—not just the most cruel masters.

### **Emily Shelby**

Mr. Shelby's wife, Emily Shelby is a loving, Christian woman who does not believe in slavery. She uses her influence with her husband to try to help the Shelbys' slaves and is one of the novel's many morally virtuous and insightful female characters.

### **George Shelby**

Called "Mas'r George" by Uncle Tom, George is the Shelbys' good-hearted son. He loves Tom and promises to rescue him from the cruelty into which his

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father sold him. After Tom dies, he resolves to free all the slaves on the family farm in Kentucky. More morally committed than his father, George not only possesses a kind heart but acts on his principles.

### **George Harris**

Eliza's husband and an intellectually curious and talented mulatto, George loves his family deeply and willingly fights for his freedom. He confronts the slave hunter Tom Loker and does not hesitate to shoot him when he imperils the family.

### **Eliza Harris**

Mrs. Shelby's maid, George's wife, and Harry's mother, Eliza is an intelligent, beautiful, and brave young slave. After Mr. Shelby makes known his plans to sell Eliza's son to Mr. Haley, she proves the force of her motherly love as well as her strength of spirit by making a spectacular escape. Her crossing of the Ohio River on patches of ice is the novel's most famous scene.

### **Harry Harris**

Eliza and George's son, a young boy.

### **Augustine St. Clare**

Tom's master in New Orleans and Eva's father, St. Clare is a flighty and romantic man, dedicated to pleasure. St. Clare does not believe in God, and he carouses and drinks every night. Although he dotes on his daughter and treats his slaves with compassion, St. Clare shares the hypocrisy of Mr. Shelby in that he sees the evil of slavery but nonetheless tolerates and practices it.

### **Eva**

St. Clare and Marie's angelic daughter. Eva, also referred to in the book as Little Eva (her given name is Evangeline) is presented as an absolutely perfect child—a completely moral being and an unimpeachable Christian. She laments the existence of slavery and sees no difference between Black and white people. After befriending Tom while still a young girl, Eva becomes one of the most important figures in his life. In death, Eva becomes one of the text's central Christ figures.

### **Miss Ophelia St. Clare**

St. Clare's cousin from the North (Vermont) who comes to help him manage the household, Ophelia opposes slavery in the abstract. However, she finds actual slaves somewhat distasteful and harbors considerable prejudice against them. After Eva's death, and through her relationship with Topsy, Ophelia realizes her failings and learns to see slaves as human beings. Stowe hoped that much of her Northern audience might recognize themselves in Ophelia and reconsider their views on slavery.

### **Marie**

St. Clare's wife, a self-centered woman. Petty, whining, and foolish, she is the very opposite of the idealized woman figure that appears repeatedly throughout the novel.

### **The Quakers**

The Quakers, a Christian group that arose in mid-seventeenth-century England, dedicated themselves to achieving an inner understanding of God, without the use of creeds, clergy, or outward rites. The Quakers have a long history of contributing to social reform and peace efforts. In many Quaker characters appear who help George and Eliza, as well as many other slaves. Stowe uses them to portray a Christianity free of hypocrisy, self-righteous display, or bigoted conventions. This kind of Christianity, she implies, can play a crucial role in the abolition of slavery.

### **Senator and Mrs. Bird**

Mrs. Bird is another example of the virtuous woman. She tries to exert influence through her husband. Senator Bird exemplifies the well-meaning



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man who is sympathetic to the abolitionist cause but who nonetheless remains complacent or resigned to the status quo.

### **Tom Loker**

A slave hunter hired by Mr. Haley to bring back Eliza, Harry, and George, Tom Loker first appears as a gruff, violent man. George shoots him when he tries to capture them, and, after he is healed by the Quakers, Loker experiences a transformation and chooses to join the Quakers rather than return to his old life.

### **Mr. Haley**

The slave trader who buys Uncle Tom and Harry from Mr. Shelby. A gruff, coarse man, Haley presents himself as a kind individual who treats his slaves well. Haley, however, mistreats his slaves, often violently.

### **Topsy**

A wild and uncivilized slave girl whom Miss Ophelia tries to reform, Topsy gradually learns to love and respect others by following the example of Eva.

### **Cassy**

Legree's (slave) mistress and Eliza's mother, Cassy proves a proud and intelligent woman and devises a clever way to escape Legree's plantation.

### **Emmeline**

A young and beautiful slave girl whom Legree buys for himself, perhaps to replace Cassy as his mistress. She has been raised as a pious Christian.

## **Themes**

### **The Evil of Slavery**

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made it illegal for anyone in the United States to offer aid or assistance to a runaway slave. The novel seeks to attack this law and the institution it protected, ceaselessly advocating the immediate emancipation of the slaves and freedom for all people. Each of Stowe's scenes, while serving



to further character and plot, also serves, without exception, to persuade the reader—especially the Northern reader of Stowe's time—that slavery is evil, un-Christian, and intolerable in a civil society.

For most of the novel, Stowe explores the question of slavery in a fairly mild setting, in which slaves and masters have seemingly positive relationships. At the Shelbys' house, and again at the St. Clares', the slaves have kindly masters who do not abuse or mistreat them. Stowe does not offer these settings in order to show slavery's evil as conditional. She seeks to expose the vices of slavery even in its best-case scenario. Though Shelby and St. Clare possess kindness and intelligence, their ability to tolerate slavery renders them hypocritical and morally weak. Even under kind masters, slaves suffer, as we see when a financially struggling Shelby guiltily destroys Tom's family by selling Tom, and when the fiercely selfish Marie, by demanding attention be given to herself, prevents the St. Clare slaves from mourning the death of her own angelic daughter, Eva. A common contemporary defense of slavery claimed that the institution benefited the slaves because most masters acted in their slaves' best interest. Stowe refutes this argument with her biting portrayals, insisting that the slave's best interest can lie only in obtaining freedom.

In the final third of the book, Stowe leaves behind the pleasant veneer of life at the Shelby and St. Clare houses and takes her reader into the Legree plantation, where the evil of slavery appears in its most naked and hideous form. This harsh and barbaric setting, in which slaves suffer beatings, sexual abuse, and even murder, introduces the power of shock into Stowe's argument. If slavery is wrong in the best of cases, in the worst of cases it is nightmarish and inhuman. In the book's structural progression between "pleasant" and hellish plantations, we can detect Stowe's rhetorical methods. First she deflates the defense of the pro-slavery reader by showing the evil of the "best" kind of slavery. She then presents her own case against slavery by showing the shocking wickedness of slavery at its worst.

### **The Incompatibility of Slavery & Christian Values**

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Writing for a predominantly religious, predominantly Protestant audience, Stowe takes great pains to illustrate the fact that the system of slavery and the moral code of Christianity oppose each other. No Christian, she insists, should be able to tolerate slavery. Throughout the novel, the more religious a character is, the more he or she objects to slavery. Eva, the most morally perfect white character in the novel, fails to understand why anyone would see a difference between Black and white people. In contrast, the morally revolting, nonreligious Legree practices slavery almost as a policy of deliberate blasphemy and evil. Christianity, in Stowe's novel, rests on a principle of universal love. If all people were to put this principle into practice, Stowe insists, it would be impossible for one segment of humanity to oppress and enslave another. Thus, not only are Christianity and slavery incompatible, but Christianity can actually be used to fight slavery.

The slave hunter Tom Loker learns this lesson after his life is spared by the slaves he tried to capture, and after being healed by the generous-hearted and deeply religious Quakers. He becomes a changed man. Moreover, Uncle Tom ultimately triumphs over slavery in his adherence to Christ's command to "love thine enemy." He refuses to compromise his Christian faith in the face of the many trials he undergoes at Legree's plantation. When he is beaten to death by Legree and his men, he dies forgiving them. In this way, Tom becomes a Christian martyr, a model for the behavior of both whites and Black people. The story of his life both exposes the evil of slavery—its incompatibility with Christian virtue—and points the way to its transformation through Christian love.

### **The Moral Power of Women**

Although Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* before the widespread growth of the women's rights movement of the late 1800s, the reader can nevertheless regard the book as a specimen of early feminism. The text portrays women as morally conscientious, committed, and courageous—indeed, often as *more* morally conscientious, committed, and courageous than men. Stowe implies a parallel between the oppression of Black people and the oppression of women, yet she expresses hope for the oppressed in her presentation of

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women as effectively influencing their husbands. Moreover, she shows how this show of strength by one oppressed group can help to alleviate the oppression of the other. White women can use their influence to convince their husbands—the people with voting rights—of the evil of slavery.

Throughout the novel, the reader sees many examples of idealized womanhood, of perfect mothers and wives who attempt to find salvation for their morally inferior husbands or sons. Examples include Mrs. Bird, St. Clare's mother, Legree's mother, and, to a lesser extent, Mrs. Shelby. The text also portrays Black women in a very positive light. Black women generally prove strong, brave, and capable, as seen especially in the character of Eliza. In the cases where women do not act morally—such as Prue in her drunkenness or Cassy with her infanticide, the women's sins are presented as illustrating slavery's evil influence rather than the women's own immorality. Not all women appear as bolsters to the book's moral code: Marie acts petty and mean, and Ophelia begins the novel with many prejudices. Nonetheless, the book seems to argue the existence of a natural female sense of good and evil, pointing to an inherent moral wisdom in the gender as a whole and encouraging the use of this wisdom as a force for social change.

## **Symbols**

### **Uncle Tom's Cabin**

Near the end of the book, after George Shelby frees his slaves, he tells them that, when they look at Uncle Tom's cabin, they should remember their freedom and dedicate themselves to leading a Christian life like Uncle Tom's. The sight of Uncle Tom's cabin on George Shelby's property serves as a persistent reminder to him of the sufferings Tom experienced as a slave. The cabin also becomes a metaphor for Uncle Tom's willingness to be beaten and even killed rather than harm or betray his fellow slaves—his willingness to suffer and die rather than go against Christian values of love and loyalty. The image of the cabin thus neatly encapsulates the main themes of the book, signifying both the destructive power of slavery and the ability of Christian love to overcome it.

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### **Eliza's Leap**

The scene of Eliza's leap across the half-frozen Ohio river constitutes the most famous episode in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The scene also serves as an important metaphor. The leap from the southern to the northern bank of the river symbolizes in one dramatic moment the process of leaving slavery for freedom. Indeed, Eliza's leap from one bank to the next literally constitutes a leap from the slave-holding states to the non-slave-holding states, as the Ohio River served as the legally recognized divide between South and North. The dangers Eliza faces in her leap, and the courage she requires to execute it successfully, represent the more general instances of peril and heroism involved in any slave's journey to freedom.

### **Geography**

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* uses the North to represent freedom and the South to represent slavery and oppression. Obviously the opposition is rooted in history. However, Stowe embellishes the opposition so as to transform it from literal to literary. Two main stories dominate the novel—the story of Eliza and George and the story of Uncle Tom. One story serves as an escape narrative, chronicling Eliza and George's flight to freedom. The other story is a slavery narrative, chronicling Uncle Tom's descent into increasingly worse states of oppression. Not surprisingly, the action in the escape narrative moves increasingly northward, with Canada representing its endpoint and the attainment of freedom by the escaped slaves. The action in the slavery narrative moves increasingly southward, with Tom's death occurring on Legree's plantation in rural Louisiana, far into the Deep South. This geographical split represents the wide gulf between freedom and slavery and plays into Stowe's general use of parallelism and contrast in making her political points.

## **Topics**

**Discuss the differences between the portrayals of men and women in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Does Tom fit with the rest of the men in the book? Why or why not? How does the portrayal of women reveal Stowe's feminism?**

Women often take the actively moral role in . Often idealized as almost angelic mothers, wives, and counselors, they become guiding moral lights. Examples of such figures include Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird, St. Clare's mother, and Legree's mother. In contrast, Stowe often portrays men as gruff, avaricious, and morally weaker than their female counterparts. Uncle Tom provides the one exception to this trend. Like many of the female characters, Tom serves the role of moral guide. Perhaps this parallel can be explained if one takes into account the similar position of disempowerment held by both white women and black slaves. Stowe never explicitly makes a connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of blacks, but she does imply it through her structure of parallelism and contrast.

### **Discuss Stowe's use of opposites and the technique of contrast in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.**

Parallels and contrasts lend Uncle Tom's Cabin its structure and inform its rhetorical power. The book features two opposing plots, the slave narrative and the escape narrative. One could compare the different directions, both literally and symbolically, that these plots take. Eliza and her husband travel ever farther north, finding freedom and happiness, while Tom travels ever farther south, entering into martyrdom and death.

Other contrasts in the book include that between the good mother narrative of Eliza with the bad mother narrative of Cassy. One could also compare and contrast the roles of the various women in the book, from the upright Mrs. Shelby to the appalling Marie; additionally, one could contrast the childhood innocence of Eva with the adult cynicism of Haley, Legree, or St. Clare. Uncle Tom's passive martyrdom contrasts with, but does not oppose, George Harris's active heroism. This use of contrast seems particularly apt for a book that critiques a politically divided nation and a society organized by differences of skin color and gender. Against the grain of conventional thinking, the text imposes its own similarities and differences that cut across received categories. The text compares the subjugated positions of blacks and white women, links Tom and the Quakers in their religiosity, associates Eva with Topsy in their otherworldly energy and naiveté, and connects both

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Tom and Eva with Jesus Christ. Simon Legree, the representative of slavery's most horrendous evils, was born in the North, in Vermont. On the other hand, George Shelby, who eventually sets his slaves free, lives his whole life on a Southern plantation. With these associations Stowe challenges conventional dichotomies between black and white, male and female, and North and South.

**What roles do circumstance and chance play in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Does the text use either of them to help explain the existence of slavery?**

Stowe acknowledges that circumstances of geography and birth may decide whether a person practices slavery, but she does not allow circumstance or chance to excuse these people. For instance, St. Clare tells Miss Ophelia that many of the prominent people in New England would be prominent slaveholders if they lived in the South. However, Stowe does not allow this to serve as a justification of slavery but rather as an indictment against humanity. All people possess some measure of evil, and therefore all people are capable of the evil of owning slaves. Depending on the circumstances of one's birth, the evil in one's life takes different forms. One should work toward eradicating the circumstances that allow this evil to become institutionalized.

## **Harriet Beecher Stowe and Uncle Tom's Cabin Background**

Upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe for the first time, Abraham Lincoln reportedly said, "So this is the little lady who made this big war." Stowe was little—under five feet tall—but what she lacked in height, she made up for in influence and success. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became one of the most widely read and deeply penetrating books of its time. It sold hundreds of thousands of copies and was translated into numerous languages. Many historians have credited the novel with contributing to the outbreak of the Civil War.

The daughter of an eminent New England preacher, Stowe was born into a family of eccentric, intelligent people. As a child, she learned Latin and wrote a children's geography book, both before she was ten years old. Throughout



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her life, she remained deeply involved in religious movements, feminist causes, and the most divisive political and moral issue of her time: the abolition of slavery.

Stowe grew up in the Northeast but lived for a time in Cincinnati, which enabled her to see both sides of the slavery debate without losing her abolitionist's perspective. Cincinnati was evenly split for and against abolition, and Stowe wrote satirical pieces on the subject for several local papers there. She often wrote pieces under pseudonyms and with contrasting styles, and one can see a similar attention to voice in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which dialects and patterns of speech contrast among characters. Though Stowe absorbed a great deal of information about slavery during her Cincinnati years, she nonetheless conducted extensive research before writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She wrote to Frederick Douglass and others for help in creating a realistic picture of slavery in the Deep South. Her Black cook and household servants also helped by telling her stories of their slave days.

Stowe's main goal with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was to convince her large Northern readership of the necessity of ending slavery. Most immediately, the novel served as a response to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made it illegal to give aid or assistance to a runaway slave. Under this legislation, Southern slaves who escaped to the North had to flee to Canada in order to find real freedom. With her book, Stowe created a sort of exposé that revealed the horrors of Southern slavery to people in the North. Her radical position on race relations, though, was informed by a deep religiosity. Stowe continually emphasizes the importance of Christian love in eradicating oppression. She also works in her feminist beliefs, showing women as equals to men in intelligence, bravery, and spiritual strength. Indeed, women dominate the book's moral code, proving vital advisors to their husbands, who often need help in seeing through convention and popular opinion.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in episodes in the *National Era* in 1851 and 1852, then published in its entirety on March 20, 1852. It sold 10,000 copies in its first week and 300,000 by the end of the year, astronomical numbers for the mid-nineteenth century. Today, analysis of both the book's conception and reception proves helpful in our understanding of the Civil War era. Within the text itself, the reader finds insights into the mind of a Christian, feminist abolitionist. For example, in the arguments Stowe uses, the reader receives a



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glimpse into the details of the slavery debate. Looking beyond the text to its impact on its society, the reader gains an understanding of the historical forces contributing to the outbreak of war.