

George L. Aiken & Harriet B. Stowe

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN:

**A DVD Dramatization and Sourcebook of Significant
Historical and Theatrical Materials**

Professor Vera M. Jiji,

Produced by the Program for Culture at Play: Multimedia Studies in
American Drama
Humanities Institute, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, N.Y.

© 1983

Revised and reissued by Professor Emerita, Vera M. Jiji

© 2010

All works in the sourcebook are the copyrighted property of their respective authors. All rights reserved. Neither the DVD nor the sourcebook, in part or in whole, may be copied, redistributed or resold by any means without written permission of the copyright holders, with the exception that teachers may copy and distribute free of charge portions of the sourcebook to their students.

"In fictitious writing, it is possible to find refuge from the hard and the terrible, by inventing scenes and characters of a more pleasing nature. No such resource is open in a work of fact; and the subject of this work is one on which the truth, if told at all, must needs be very dreadful. There is no bright side to slavery, as such. Those scenes which are made bright by the generosity and kindness of masters and mistresses would be brighter still if the element of slavery were withdrawn.... **Slavery, therefore, is not the element which forms the picturesque and beautiful of Southern life. What is peculiar to slavery, and distinguishes it from free servitude, is evil, and only evil, and that continually.**" *Harriet Beecher Stowe, The Key to UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*



Table of Contents

<u>INTRODUCTION: To the Reader</u>	1
<u>Part One: Literary and Theatrical Considerations</u>	4
Gerald Warshaver, THE POPULAR SENTIMENTS OF <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i>	4
Elizabeth Ammons, STOWE'S BLACK MATERNAL CHRIST, TOM	9
Glenn Loney, SETTING THE 19th CENTURY STAGE FOR <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i> : From New York Theatres To "Tom Shows" In Town Halls and Tents	16
Vera Jiji, CONSIDERING <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i> AS DRAMA	24
Daniel Gerould, <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i> AND MELODRAMA	27
<u>Part Two: Cultural, Societal and Historical Considerations</u>	35
Florence Polatnick, AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	36
Errol Hill, THE CASE AGAINST <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i>	47
William E. Perkins, SOME THOUGHTS ON WILLIAM WELLS BROWN'S <i>THE ESCAPE</i>	56
<u>Part Three: Primary Source Materials</u>	59
Theodore Weld, <i>AMERICAN SLAVERY AS IT IS, TESTIMONY OF A THOUSAND WITNESSES</i> , 1838	60
Frederick Douglass, WHAT THE BLACK MAN WANTS, 1845	62
SELECTIONS FROM <i>THE KEY TO UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i> , HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, 1853.....	67
FROM TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION: FATHER HENSON'S STORY OF HIS OWN LIFE, 1858.	69
FROM FRANCES ANN KEMBLE, <i>JOURNAL OF A RESIDENCE ON A GEORGIAN PLANTATION IN 1838-1839</i> , (pub. 1863).....	70
SELECTIONS FROM HARRY BIRDOFF, <i>THE WORLD'S GREATEST HIT</i> , 1947. Reviews from 1857, 1881.....	75
Vera Jiji, DISTORTING HUMOR: Brady, THE AUCTION SCENE, 1901	76
Comments Regarding the 1903 Edison silent film of <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> Included on our DVD:.....	86
Film Catalogue, 1903 <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i> , Copyright Thomas A. Edison	88
W. E. B. DuBois, THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK (1903)	93
Early Reviews from Barnard Hewitt, <i>THEATRE: U.S.A.</i> , 1959 from 1852, 1853.....	101
FROM James Baldwin, EVERYBODY'S PROTEST NOVEL, 1949	105

J. C. Furnas, SELECTION FROM GOODBYE TO UNCLE TOM, 1956.....	110
FROM LESLIE FIEDLER, THE INADVERTENT EPIC, 1966	111
Stephen A. Hirsch, "UNCLE TOMITUDES: THE POPULAR REACTION TO <i>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</i> " in <i>STUDIES IN THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE</i> , 1978	113
Edmund Wilson, SELECTIONS FROM <i>PATRIOTIC GORE, STUDIES IN THE LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR</i> , 1994.....	114
David Pilgrim, "The Tom Caricature," Ferris State University, 2000	116
H.L. Gates, Jr., interviewed by H. Blume about <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , 2006.....	125
OUR VIDEO AND DVD: THE INNER EYE, THE PERFORMED SCENE, ON THE SCREEN.....	127

<u>Part Four: Appendices</u>	129
POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:.....	129
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:	132
CONTRIBUTORS.....	133

INTRODUCTION: To the Reader

Like any art form, the drama reflects, dissects and affects the culture of which it is a part. This is as true of plays performed in nineteenth century America as it is now. Yet, though most playgoers are familiar with plays like *Death of a Salesman*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *Cabaret*, they would be unable to recall even the name, let alone the plot or characters, of earlier American plays. Nevertheless, plays flourished and were performed all across the nation, providing audiences with larger-than-life characters who shaped earlier American thought as extensively, perhaps, as Lucy Ricardo, Archie Bunker or Seinfeld have shaped our own. Moreover, although the plays themselves may no longer be seen, the absorption of these characters into American thought has left many strong traces which still affect our thought and behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this series is to showcase neglected dramas of significance from our past so that they may be studied for what they are: not necessarily revelations of eternal human qualities, but rather artifacts of American society of historical importance that affected not only our ancestors but still have consequences today.

The play chosen here is *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*, certainly the most important play ever produced in the United States. Its popularity and longevity were so great that it can be credited, almost single-handedly with the birth of regional theatre in this country. In 1852, most Americans, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, thought the theatre immoral, so much so, that when Stowe's permission was sought for dramatization of the novel, she refused it, noting that "If the barrier which now keeps young people of Christian families from theatrical entertainments is once broken down . . . these young people will be open to all the temptations of those who are not such, as there will be . . . five bad plays to one good.... The world is not yet good enough for it to succeed." Yet succeed it did beyond all expectations when George L. Aiken dramatized it without her permission. The phenomenal success of this "great and moral play" broke the barriers against theatrical patronage so completely that religious people flocked to see it--not only in already constructed opera houses, museums and academies of music, but in town halls, tents, anywhere at all. Thus, theatres were built to accommodate various dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* all over the country, and regional theatre was born.

The articles written for this casebook help the reader to understand and appreciate the play's overwhelming significance. In "An Historical Perspective," Florence Polatnick considers the evidence for the validity of Lincoln's quip that Harriet Beecher Stowe started the Civil War. Although the effect of the play cannot be separated from that of the novel, the latter ceased to be a best seller within a few years of publication, whereas the play continued its unparalleled record of performance, season after season for eighty years, all over this country and abroad. By 1900, the number who had seen it equaled the population of the United States. An army chaplain recorded that, after the Civil War, some Southerners who saw the play in New York left the theatre and "walked for some time in silence, until the South Carolinian, profoundly moved, burst forth, "Well, *that's* what licked us!"

Another fateful effect the play had was that it ordained the way in which most white Americans saw their black fellow citizens. Our earlier articles reflect various attempts to deal with the problem of setting down the horrors of slavery in a literary context without such severe distortion that the abolitionist cause was harmed more than helped. Thus Stowe in our epigraph

and her description of Topsy tries to explain how and why she handled some of her problems as a writer of fiction as she did. Furnas and Baldwin excoriate her for her sentimentality. Kemble's *Journal* entries and Weld's reports by eye-witnesses (neither fictional forms) are included so that students can consider how these selections modify their own views on the subject, how profound their effect is on the reader, and what that tells us about the art of propaganda. Josiah Henson's account of his religious conversion is set down so that students can compare it to Tom's behavior. Frederick Douglass' mention of Uncle Tom in his speech is an early attempt to deal with the stereotype of Tom as too passive in his own defense. W.E.B. DuBois describes the complex relationship between freed black students and education so clearly that many of his comments might apply equally well today. Baldwin's discussion of the relationship between an event and the language in which it is recounted take us to the borders of current post-structural critical concerns with language as traducer and traitor as it supposedly records experience.

If we feel ourselves lost in a quagmire, trying to understand what we read about race relations in a play written in 1852, these articles have been written to provide the necessary background information. Warshaver sets the work for us in the context of nineteenth century literary traditions, so that we may view the domestic themes and sentimental tone of novel and play in that context. Ammons places the work in relationship to the author's life, concerns and radical feminist philosophy. Loney describes the physical aspects of nineteenth century American theatres, so that we can understand better some of the transformations which the play suffered during its long life, while Gerould discusses the dramatic tradition of melodrama into which the play falls. Hill explores the changing response of the black community to this play which so strongly affected the way in which most whites responded to the black community. Perkins considers a play written in 1858 by an escaped slave, William Wells Brown, who had the benefit of intimate knowledge not only of masters and slaves other than himself, but who knew Stowe's play as well.

We might have assumed that his play would give a more accurate, less stereotypical view of the subject than *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*. That it does not again raises profound questions about the relationship between experience itself and the language we use when we try to put experience into some shape, like a play, in which to convey that experience to others.

We can see here some of the extreme changes which others made to Aiken's play. An included "humorous" variant version of the auction scene illustrates the outrageous surgery performed on the work to appeal to popular taste. Thomas Edison's 1903 movie shows the unbelievable prevalence of dancing in his version of the play. He also includes a steamboat race scene, certainly the latest "new" thing. Our many quotes from reviews also show us how radically the work can be transformed by passing through the mind of the reviewer. He sees what he has brought into the theatre in his head, not what others are seeing onstage at the same moment.

In the *Journal of the African Activist Association*, a black writer declares that "Each Black American today, in fact or in fiction, is an embodiment of the experiences of his predecessors. Each Bigger Thomas, each Cross Damon . . . is an amalgam of . . . Uncle Tom, Dred, Frederick Douglass, Garvey, King, Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon . . . and Uncle Tom, both mythically and historically, has been a cardinal point in this revolution of the black mind. Every Black man in America carries in him not only a bit of Bigger Thomas, but also a bit of Uncle Thomas. This is the fact and basis of his survival."

As we read Baldwin's, Gates' and other reviewers' comments on the book, we can see how much this "amalgam" has shifted. We not only agree with the previous quotation, but add that white Americans also hold major misconceptions about Uncle Tom, many illustrated in David Pilgrim's article about Uncle Tom caricatures. These misapprehensions can be purged only through studying the history of confusions and misrepresentations of racial stereotypes this work engendered. Thus our purpose in featuring this work: sourcebook, 1903 film and the DVD of our 1983 condensed production of Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. We invite you to study it for yourselves. We think you'll find its messages and meanings far more revealing, central, interesting and complex than you expect.

Part Two: Cultural, Societal and Historical Considerations

While it is a modern truism that all books should be read in an historical context, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provides a stunning example of the importance of that perspective. Originally it fostered the climate for the successful prosecution of the Civil War. The novel became the world's best seller after the Bible. Theatrical productions of Aiken's adaptation and other, cheaper and more vulgar versions became the foundation of American regional theatre. Stereotypes of the characters emerged from the debased theatrical performances and were seized upon by both those for and against emancipation. Unfortunately, these stereotypes invaded our movies, our advertising and our thinking. During the 1960's and 1970's, the Black Power Movement excoriated the peace-loving Uncle Tom envisioned by Stowe. In many circles, "Uncle Tom" became a term of derision. Now, through a study of the novel and play and the reactions to them over the last century and a half, a reader may uncover the whole outline of slavery and racism and how they have played out in our country. The following articles in our sourcebook substantiate the generalizations made here. Read them and then decide for yourself what you believe.

Florence Polatnick, AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Scholars of American literature and historians of the nineteenth century disagree as to the short and long range effects of *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*, but they agree unanimously that it is unparalleled as a piece of successful propaganda.

The work began modestly enough as a serial in *The National Era*, an antislavery weekly. Each edition of the newspaper was eagerly awaited. Tattered copies were passed from hand to hand until they fell apart. The following March, the book was published.

The Novel's Reception

Hot off the press, the book was a sensation. It sold out its first edition of 5,000 copies in less than two days. Some 300,000 copies were sold in the first year. In all it is estimated that about three million copies have been sold in the United States. The book undoubtedly reached every literate family in the North, and, as Lader points out, the children who heard it read around the fire at night were the voters of 1860 and the soldiers of 1861.

The impact was no less phenomenal overseas. Outstanding literary lights reviewed *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*—Thomas Macaulay, George Sand, Heinrich Heine. Three Paris newspapers simultaneously ran installments. In Germany alone seventy-five different editions were published. The Italian public gobbled up *Il Zio Tom* despite its having been banned by the Pope. Russian censors also outlawed the book, but Tolstoy obtained a copy. It reportedly made such an impression on him that he ranked Mrs. Stowe as one of the all-time literary greats, along with Dostoyevsky and Victor Hugo.

All over Europe there sprang up restaurants, creameries, and shops based on an Uncle Tom theme. The book was translated into some forty different languages and dialects, including Siamese. In all of history, only the Bible has appeared in so many different versions.

By far the most significant impact was felt in England. Within one year forty pirated editions were printed in the United Kingdom and its colonies. In all, the best guess puts the total of copies sold in the United Kingdom and its colonies at one and a half million. The Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, is said to have read *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* three times. Lader informs us that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had been considering closing the Canadian border to runaway slaves but were so affected by the book that they reversed themselves.¹ When in 1853, 500,000 signed the "Affectionate and Christian Address of British Women to their Sisters, the Women of the United States of America"—a petition to abolish slavery- it was presented to Mrs. Stowe as the outstanding anti-slavery figure in this country.

Some scholars credit Harriet Beecher Stowe with an even greater influence on the course of British-American relations during the Civil War. English economic interests were clearly favorable to the South. The English purchased the Southerners' tobacco and cotton. Confederate gunboats were being built in British shipyards. The economic argument was then dressed up in political casuistry; British newspapers argued that the Southern states had as

much right to rebel as the original thirteen colonies. Parliament was considering granting official recognition to the Confederate States of America when Mrs. Stowe decided to answer the "Affectionate and Christian" anti-slavery petition she had received ten years earlier from the women of England. Since her response followed closely her visit to the White House, it is believed that the two events are connected. Mrs. Stowe made an eloquent appeal for British support of those forces that were working for the abolition of slavery, i.e., the Northern states, and cleverly closed with a sentence lifted from the original: "We appeal to you as sisters, as wives, and as mothers, to raise your voices to your fellow citizens, and your prayers to God, for the removal of this affliction and disgrace from the Christian world." Some historians do not believe that her "Reply" had much effect. Nevertheless, it bolstered the moral forces urging England to stand by its anti-slavery principles. Recognition and aid to the Confederate States was never granted.

The Slavery Issue: 1787-1850

To what can we attribute Mrs. Stowe's phenomenal success? First, the nation had been moving inexorably toward a showdown between the North and the South. Even before the Constitution was adopted, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 prohibited slavery in the territory north of the Ohio River between the Mississippi and the Appalachians. Two years later the writers of the Constitution could not get the Southern states—Georgia and South Carolina in particular—to join the Union without serious concessions concerning slavery, although the word itself was never used. A number equal to three-fifths of the slave population was added to white Southern delegations in the House of Representatives. Increased representation also gave the slave states an advantage in the Electoral College.

Since Northern ship owners and merchants had a heavy stake in the slave trade and in the products produced by slaves, they granted another concession to the slave states: instead of immediately outlawing the slave trade, the cutoff was postponed until 1808.

After the formation of the union, sectional interests continued to force compromises with slavery. When Missouri applied for admission to the Union as a slave state, some heavy "logrolling" by representatives of Southern planters and Northern manufacturing and shipping interests resulted in the Compromise of 1820. Maine, its territory detached from Massachusetts, was admitted as a free state, Missouri as a slave state. In addition, a line was drawn across the remainder of the Louisiana Territory. South of the boundary, slavery would be permitted.

As the fever of "Manifest Destiny" gripped the nation—that supposedly divinely inspired mandate to stretch the Stars and Stripes from ocean to ocean, the unsuccessful campaigns to conquer Canada in both the Revolution and the War of 1812 discouraged expansionists from looking to the North. However, a war with Spain added Florida. Mexico's attempt to outlaw slavery in Texas resulted in a United States invasion and annexation of half of our southern neighbor's territory. Many abolitionists decried the use of national policy to enlarge the power and enrich the pockets of the slaveholders.

Meanwhile, the South almost seceded over the tariff issue in 1828 and again in 1832. Believing that the plantation system could not make profits with free labor, the South

pressed for guarantees of the continuation of slavery. As time went by, these deep rifts were patched over with a series of make-shift compromises.

The Compromise of 1850

Another breaking point occurred in 1850. Gold was discovered in California in 1848, and within a year there was enough population for the territory to claim statehood. Most of the settlers were from the North, but admission of California to the Union as a free state would have upset the delicate balance in Congress. Anti-slavery forces were at the same time hammering away at a national disgrace—slave auctions in the District of Columbia practically in the shadow of the Capitol.

The Compromise of 1850 allowed California to enter as a free state. The public sale of slaves in the capital was abolished. But in return for these concessions the South demanded a heavy price. They insisted that the states to be carved out of the remainder of the Mexican Cession would decide the slavery issue for themselves on the basis of "squatter sovereignty," thus allowing the settlers with slaves to move in and dominate the ultimate decision. The Federal government had to assume the debt of Texas during its ten year nationhood, and the Southerners finally secured a Fugitive Slave Law with teeth. The provisions of this Fugitive Slave Act outraged even moderates on the slavery question. It violated the most basic guarantees of the Constitution and fundamentals of American law. Specifically appointed Federal Commissioners would make a decision solely on the basis of affidavits presented by the owner of the suspected escapee. The accused was not permitted a hearing or a jury trial, and his/her testimony was not admissible. There was no provision for a stay or an appeal. The Federal Commissioner was paid ten dollars for each person returned to the slave owner, but only five dollars if he decided to free the accused. Even worse, every citizen was turned into a potential slave catcher because the Federal Commissioner could call on any bystander for aid. A marshal or deputy refusing to make an arrest was fined \$1,000, no small sum in those days. The same penalty plus six months in jail covered anyone concealing or rescuing a fugitive. In addition, the slave owners could institute civil damage suits for each slave lost. Also troublesome was the ex post facto nature of the law; those former slaves who had escaped and lived as free Negroes for years faced possible return to bondage. Even those born free felt the danger. The Compromise of 1850 had given the South an unrestricted hunting license in the Northern states. Despite the efforts of Daniel Webster and Henry Clay to preserve the Union with elaborate appeasements, the political stage was set for the fantastic reception of *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*.

The Abolitionist Movement

A second reason for the novel's success was that the public conscience had been prepared by long years of abolitionist activity. Twenty years had passed since William Lloyd Garrison put out the first issue of *The Liberator* for the express purpose that "every chain be broken and every bondsman set free." Despite poverty, social ostracism, insults, threats, near-lynchings, he proclaimed, "I will not retreat an inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD!"

Another strong voice was that of Mrs. Lydia Maria Child, the best-selling author in the United States with her books of "how-to" guidance, *The Frugal Housewife*, *The Mother's Book*,

The Little Girl's Own Book. In 1833 she issued *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans!* The South reacted by public burnings of her blameless household books and by sending vitriolic letters. However, in her hometown of Boston she was met with stony silence. The fortunes of many of the "best" families were directly or indirectly tied to slavery. Disapproval was expressed by an act, the severity of which can only be appreciated by those familiar with Boston—Mrs. Child's free card to the Athanaeum was withdrawn.

Another activist, Theodore Weld, wrote many articles, pamphlets, and books as leader of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1839 he published *Slavery As It Is*. (See selection below). It became the Bible of the abolitionist movement. Harriet Beecher Stowe was supposed to have kept Weld's book in her workbasket by day and under her pillow at night. A number of incidents described in this abolitionist's handbook were made part of the plot of *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*—e.g., the whipping of George Harris by the child of his white master. Many historians believe Weld's book has not been sufficiently appreciated as a major factor in influencing public opinion. In its first year alone *Slavery As It Is* sold 100,000 copies. Weld was also assistant to John Quincy Adams in the campaign to present thousands of petitions against slavery on the floor of the House of Representatives. After being denied a second term in the Presidency in 1828, Adams returned to Washington as a Massachusetts Congressman from 1831 to 1848. He became the main Congressional spokesman for the abolitionist movement. Adams would not allow the slavery issue to be buried. He exhorted, provoked, forced debates; and when the opposition tried to shut him up by parliamentary maneuvering, he defied the Gag Rule and continued to introduce the petitions containing thousands of signatures gathered by Weld and his colleagues in the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Slave Narratives

For many years before Harriet Beecher Stowe was inspired to contribute to the growing mountain of abolitionist literature, poetry and narratives by former slaves had continued to make a deep impression on the public. Weld's group and others maintained schools for the education of free Negroes, many of the teachers having originally come from Lyman Beecher's Cincinnati theological school. Abolitionists wanted blacks to write their own stories so that they would ring true and would contradict the myth of Negro mental inferiority. However, for those who were illiterate, ghost writers filled in. They were often important literary figures or scholars—e.g., John Greenleaf Whittier, Lydia Maria Child, Edmund Quincy. So that by the time Mrs. Stowe launched her attack on "this horror, this nightmare abomination!" many Northerners were familiar with the miserable details of plantation life from the slave narratives that had been condensed or serialized in their newspapers and magazines.

The best known of the antebellum biographies of escaped slaves is *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* published in 1845 from which Mrs. Stowe borrowed. (See selection below). Douglass continued to write books and published a newspaper which had wide circulation. In addition, he was a first-rate public speaker and was often featured at abolitionist rallies.

Another outstanding black author was William Wells Brown. During his flight from Kentucky, William "no second name" was helped by Wells Brown. The escapee took the name of and dedicated his first book to the Quaker "conductor" on the Underground Railroad to whom he owed so much. The first Negro seriously to attempt such literary forms as the novel, drama,

and travel literature, he was also responsible for the best of the songbooks of the abolitionist movement, *The Anti-Slavery Harp*, which contained verses sung to familiar tunes like "Auld Lang Syne." Like Douglass, he was a major attraction on the Northern lecture circuit. (See selections below.)

Another important lecturer was Henry Bibb, who had escaped from Kentucky across the river to Cincinnati in 1837. Returning for his wife, he was caught, but escaped again. By all accounts, Bibb was able to wring the hearts of audiences who came to hear his descriptions of the whippings, the miscegenation, babies being torn from their mothers' breasts, husbands and wives separated, and all the other abominations of the slave auctions. Bibb, like many other blacks in the North, fled to Canada after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, but he remained active in the cause.

Scholars specializing in this phase of our country's history have brought to public attention many other ante-bellum black authors. Biographies, poetry, essays, newspaper accounts, pamphlets, sermons, and speeches had been contributed by both black and white authors. There was an 1834 novel by Richard Hildreth, *The Slave: or, Memoirs of Archy Moore*, and even two plays—*The Branded Hand* in 1845 and *Warren* in 1850. Suffice to say, the message had been drummed into the public's mind over many years, and as a result, Harriet Beecher Stowe's vast audience had been conditioned for acceptance. But *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* was the spark that lit the fire.

Didacticism and the Historical Novel

Mrs. Stowe's book is a historical novel in the tradition of an author she and most others in the nineteenth century much admired—Sir Walter Scott. It is Dickensian in its wide-ranging survey of everyday life of ordinary people and its sharp observations on the relationships of social classes. An entire civilization—wayside inns, riverboats, slave markets, the range of homes from St. Clare's estate to the less luxurious Shelby plantation, to the horrible Legree farm, to the modest Quaker homes, to Miss Ophelia's proper New England establishment, to the poor slave quarters—was detailed in its scope. Many Europeans made their acquaintance with America only through its pages. The novel gave the impression of authenticity. In fact, after the inflamed Southern counter-attack, Mrs. Stowe painstakingly documented her sources a year later in *The Key to Uncle Tom* (See selection below). She cited her experiences during eighteen years in Cincinnati, court records, handbills, advertisements, newspaper reports, and eyewitness accounts like that of Josiah Henson, a former slave whose 1849 narrative she had read, whom she had met at her brother's home, and who some scholars believe, became the model for Uncle Tom (See selection below). The minor characters, most of whom are slaves, cover a full range of emotions—joy, love, sorrow, pride, weakness—all human qualities denied by the concept of chattel slavery. The examples of Eliza and George Harris, Aunt Chloe, and, of course, Uncle Tom gave a dimension to the sin of slavery that the abolitionists' pamphlets and speeches never could.

The 19th Century Religious Revival

Another great social movement in the mid-nineteenth century joined the inexorable flow toward civil war—i.e., an intense religious revival in America. In addition, new creeds like

Unitarianism and Mormonism were spreading their beliefs and provoking counter-movements. Evangelism was popular, particularly on the newly settled frontier. We must never forget that Mrs. Stowe's life was permeated with religion. She was steeped in the Calvinist tradition of Jonathan Edwards. Along with many others, Harriet Beecher Stowe had been nurtured on a theory of history derived from Cotton Mather. God had reserved America for the founding of Christ's Commonwealth, he wrote in his *Magnalia Christi Americana*. The Puritan Fathers were giants predestined to lead their saintly flocks into the wilderness, sustained by God's grace. The leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony were held up as heroic models for later generations to follow. "What wonderful stories those! They made me feel the very ground I trod to be consecrated," Mrs. Stowe wrote in her autobiographical notes. She felt that *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* and her later slave novel *Dred* were historical in nature. Today historians try to present the facts of the past in an unbiased, non-prejudicial way. Not so Mrs. Stowe. She was writing a didactic book, documenting "the peculiar institution" of American slavery to force recognition of its evil sin so that the nation could cleanse itself and get back on the track of the Divine Plan.

American Messianism

In *The Flowering of New England* Van Wyck Brooks quotes an 1853 letter by Mrs. Stowe: ". . . the whole world looks hopefully toward America as a nation especially raised by God to advance the cause of human liberty and religion..." And so when we read that Mrs. Stowe told people that God was the actual author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that He had only used her as an instrument, we cannot dismiss her as a fanatic. Most people of her era thought in religious terms. The concepts of guilt, damnation, redemption were very much on people's minds in the 1850's. So that, again, Harriet Beecher Stowe stood in the mainstream of American popular opinion.

The student who reads about Harriet Beecher Stowe before actually tackling the novel will be led to expect a call to arms and is disappointed to find no such revolutionary message. In fact, Mrs. Stowe was surprised at the fervor with which the abolitionists took up her book; she had thought it too mild for them.

She believed that true Christian love, after the model of Uncle Tom, would solve all the problems. Just as Tom forgave his tormentors, she did not blame the South for the evils of slavery. It was the system itself that was at fault. In fact, two Southern whites, Mrs. Shelby and St. Clare are anti-slavery Southerners. The villain Simon Legree is a transplanted Yankee. Like many of the early abolitionists, Mrs. Stowe was a gradualist. She believed that the United States of America was chosen by God to be a citadel of liberty and that the struggle to free the slaves was a continuation of the upward movement toward equality, a fulfillment of the philosophy of the Founding Fathers. Moreover, she was certain that when Southerners realized that slavery is a sin for which God would eventually exact retribution, they would gradually free their bondsmen. Meanwhile, she insisted, the clergy must cease their hypocritical silence, must thunder their disapproval in the tradition of Calvin and Knox.

Her conclusion to *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* sums it all up: "A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the Christian Church has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a

common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved—but by repentance, justice, and mercy; for not surer is the eternal law by which the millstone sinks in the ocean, than that stronger law by which injustice and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty God!"

Stowe's Political Views

Mrs. Stowe supported the American Anti-Slavery Society's program of sit-ins, economic and social boycotts, non-cooperation with government, refusal to obey unjust laws, and non-violent harassment and interference with slave-catchers. She approved of efforts like those of her beloved brother Henry Ward Beecher, who held "benevolent" slave auctions to raise money among his Brooklyn parishioners to buy slaves and free them. She was sensitive enough to the rights of property to realize that compensation must be offered to slaveholders for their losses.

But once the blacks became free—then what? They must be protected, Mrs. Stowe said, for the former slaves would be weak and simple. Whites would have to use their superior strength and knowledge to educate and uplift the downtrodden. If only every Topsy could be put in the care of a Miss Ophelia, the blacks would be raised up to become self-reliant citizens, thoughtful voters, responsible legislators.

The fact is Mrs. Stowe had little first hand knowledge of slavery. From her vantage point during the Cincinnati years she saw many auctions, her family helped escapees, she had even made a brief sojourn to visit a plantation on the Kentucky side of the river. Her brother had spent time in New Orleans and had reported his observations and impressions. However, the escaped slaves she encountered were almost all from the border states where they tended to be more sophisticated and often educated. Many, like Frederick Douglass, lived in urban settings and were skilled artisans. Another group of blacks whom she knew were the speakers at abolitionist meetings, writers, preachers. These were hardly representative of the mass of "cotton choppers" in Alabama or Mississippi or the slaves such as those living in sub-human conditions on Sea Island, Georgia described by Fanny Kemble (See selection below).

In her ingenuous innocence Mrs. Stowe believed that one generation of education and liberty would be enough to wipe out the lingering stain of slavery. It was this kind of naive optimism and lack of understanding of the deep psychological and cultural gulf that blacks had to bridge that doomed Reconstruction and set back the cause of true equality.

Another solution favored by Mrs. Stowe was sending blacks back to Africa. It was for this purpose the American Colonization Society was formed in 1816. The main argument was that for many reasons, not necessarily their fault, Negroes were destined to fail as free men in white America, and that they were better off among their own kind. Humane reformers, mostly Quakers, would buy freedom for the slaves, provide them with farm equipment, tools, animals, etc., and ship them to West Africa. Not only would Negroes be free, but they would carry the Christian religion, for which it was thought they had a special affinity, as missionaries to the heathens of their own race.

Most free blacks opposed this scheme. First, they refused to abandon their chained brethren and the possible help they could offer them. Second, they pointed out, they were native-born Americans. They had been cut off from their African heritage. For them Africa was exile.

In *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* Mrs. Stowe sent the Harris family on to Africa after their successful escape to Canada. A prominent Negro leader of the time, George T. Downing, pointed out that George Harris, the only black in the novel who "really betrays any other than the subservient, submissive Uncle Tom spirit, which has been the cause of so much disrespect felt for the colored man," is left in Liberia. In *Black Abolitionists* Quarles cites Mrs. Stowe to the effect that if she had it to do over, she would not have sent George Harris to Liberia.

Stowe's Views After 1852

Some of Mrs. Stowe's ideas changed between *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* and the publication of *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* in 1856. What happened in the five year interval? 1854 was a watershed year. Stephen A. Douglas, Democratic Senator from Illinois, had reopened the raw wound of the slavery debate by introducing the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. Its provisions repealed the boundary line dividing slave and free states as laid down by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Douglas proposed two future states to be carved out of the Louisiana Territory—Kansas and Nebraska—in which settlers could decide the slavery issue for themselves. Douglas dressed up this old principle of "squatter sovereignty" as support for popular self-government. The more cynical historians believed he was motivated less by his regard for Jeffersonian ideals than by his need for Southern support for his Presidential bid and his interest in a transcontinental railroad running along the central route.

As soon as the law was passed, settlers quickly poured into the Kansas Territory. Numbers were important in order to control the territorial legislature, and many pro-slavers temporarily crossed over from Missouri so that they could vote. Violence escalated, and heretofore pacifist abolitionist groups began to collect money to arm the "free soilers." Mrs. Stowe's brother Henry was active in this campaign; in fact, the rifles sent West were called "Beecher's Bibles." As the nation watched, "Bleeding Kansas" provided an ominous preview of the coming War Between the States.

In the same year, after Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts excoriated his colleague Andrew Butler of South Carolina, he was almost beaten to death on the Senate floor by Representative Preston Brooks, a relative of Butler. The House refused to censure the attacker. Three days later, back in Kansas, John Brown led a raid in which five pro-slavery men were murdered.

Another 1854 event which greatly influenced Mrs. Stowe was the formation of the Republican Party, a patchwork of Northern anti-slavery Whigs, anti-slavery Democrats, and Free Soilers. They were dedicated to resisting the extension of slavery. John C. Fremont, their first Presidential candidate, the Pathfinder of the West, the hero of California, was the kind of candidate Mrs. Stowe could support.

It was these fast-moving events that caused Mrs. Stowe to change direction in the middle of writing *Dred*. Although she still appealed to humanitarian and Christian pacificism as exemplified by the educated, generous heroine and the serious young lawyer working to raise up the Negro, she also made much of the economic argument against slavery—Yankee thrift under free labor as superior to the inefficiencies and corrupting influence of the plantation system. Although she still believed the best solution was gradual emancipation after a paternalistic, educational process, the plot veered off midway in the book, as if she suddenly saw that it was no longer possible for Northerners and Southerners of good will to effect reconciliation. She had decided that the conflict between the North and the South was now inevitable. The hero became an escaped slave modeled after Nat Turner, who had led a rebellion in 1831. *Dred* talks like the kind of preacher Mrs. Stowe admired, spewing righteous wrath, like a prophet in the Old Testament.

Mrs. Stowe's solutions to the problem of slavery were not the resounding success that should have crowned such earnest effort and widespread circulation. The spirit of Christian love did not seem to energize many Southerners to free their slaves voluntarily—or even to accept compensation for so doing. Most Christian ministers continued to reflect the attitudes of their flocks rather than reshape them into a rejection of the sin of slavery. Freed blacks went to Canada in greater numbers after the Fugitive Slave Law, but emigration to Africa lagged.

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN certainly did not cause the Civil War, but Mrs. Stowe supplied the moral indignation that made the North secure in the feeling that God was on their side. Just as we "know" the ancient Greeks from the writing of Homer, *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*, this "Iliad of the Blacks," is responsible for molding attitudes about Southerners and blacks that persist even until this day.

Popular Reactions to *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

Furnas attacks Harriet Beecher Stowe by summing up some of the misunderstandings the "unwary" reader will carry away: "Slave owners are (or were) snarling brutes of paranoid tendency and criminal background. Slaves themselves, when markedly of 'African race,' are either gentle and pellucidly Christian or diabolically brutalized. When markedly tinged with 'white blood,' they are far more intelligent, enterprising and sensitive and show it by running away in great numbers. Slave women usually run away either because their children have been sold away from them or because master has assailed their virtue. Northerners are much to blame for an un-Christian repugnance toward Negroes, for black skins contain souls of which Heaven is solicitous. But one must not expect full intelligence and refinement from many members of the innately handicapped 'African race,' a term that can dispense with definition since everybody knows more or less what it means." (See selection below).

The Play Distorted

What followed was even more dismaying. Like windblown seeds the Uncle Tom plays sprang up everywhere in the United States and Europe. This phenomenon of the Uncle Tom plays and their distortions for the purposes of spectacle, drama, and humor are detailed elsewhere in this sourcebook, but in assessing the long-range historical effects we must note

that these plays not only perpetuated Mrs. Stowe's unfortunate misconceptions about blacks, they twisted them into cruel and dangerous new shapes.

In one version black characters jiggered and played the banjo in the big slave auction scene—happy darkies! Another introduced "The Quadroon Lady's Maid Burlesque Pas de Trois." The role of Topsy expanded because of the possibility of introducing humor and hijinks. Uncle Tom often did cakewalks and sang popular "coon songs."

Revived after the Civil War, these plays swept the country like prairie fires. By the late 1870's the presentations were a combination minstrel show and circus. Because of the lack of recreational opportunity in the Bible Belt, the greatest impact came in the small and isolated hamlets. Where there was no auditorium, tents were set up. People could go to see an Uncle Tom show and not be considered sinful. Unfortunately, their minds were being filled with the harmful stereotypes which are still alive today.

Too many historians concentrate on the facts, the documented events, and the reality and overlook what is gradually happening in people's minds. Victor Hugo wrote, "An invasion of armies can be resisted but not an idea whose time has come." Harriet Beecher Stowe's idea in *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* was to put a human face on slavery so that objective analysis was swept away by moral indignation. The ground had been well plowed and enriched by many abolitionist authors, both black and white, poets, lecturers, lobbyists, so that the seed she planted sprouted vigorously. Perhaps Lincoln was making a wry exaggeration when he credited Mrs. Stowe with starting the Civil War, but it was his way of acknowledging *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* as one of the most powerful pieces of propaganda of all times, the good and bad effects of which continue to shade national and international attitudes even today.



Part Four: Appendices

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Literary Considerations

1. Do you agree with Elizabeth Ammons' characterization of Tom as "odd"?
2. Discuss this question by Daniel Gerould "Which set of beliefs will overcome evil: Tom's defense of faith in the Lord through self-sacrifice, or George's black-nationalist trust in his pistol and good aim?"
3. Compare Aiken's play to Stowe's novel. How does the necessity to compress the novel into a play alter the work's themes, characterization, and portrayal of American life and slavery?
4. Discuss the characterizations of black characters contrasting Stowe's vision of a) Eliza and George, b) Tom, c) Topsy, d) Cassie, e) Sambo.
5. After reading Errol Hill's article, reevaluate the racism of the play.
6. Birdoff's book is full of anecdotes which illustrate the audience's willingness to accept the fictional world of the play. To what extent and in what respect does that audience willingness exist today?
7. Discuss how the need to make money affected *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* in its early days. In TV and movies today?
8. Discuss the role of humor in the complete Aiken version of the play.
9. Discuss the roles of a) sentiment b) melodrama c) religion in the play.
10. Discuss the efficacy of the play as a propaganda piece.
11. Discuss the justice of Furnas' and Baldwin's criticisms of *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* reprinted in this book.

The Video

12. Discuss how the characters as presented in the DVD differed from your conception of them.
13. Discuss our changes in the original Aiken version a) adding Topsy's powdering and b) using black actors for black parts.
14. What changed in your response to the text as a result of your seeing our video?
15. In the novel, Uncle Tom is a young man. On the stage he was usually played in his sixties. How do you think your response was affected by our using a younger actor?
16. How would your response have differed if we used white actors for Eliza, George, and Cassie? Whites in blackface for Tom, Topsy and Sambo?
17. Our actors doubling (and tripling their parts) were in the tradition of the play. How did that affect your response?

18. Read William Wells Brown's *The Escape or A Leap for Freedom* (reprinted in James Hatch & Ted Shine, *Black Theatre: USA* and compare it to the play of *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* in regard to its portrayal of: slavery, black straight and comic characters, white slave owners, its reception by audiences when recited by its author.
19. Read Harriet Beecher Stowe's dramatization of *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* called *A Christian Slave* (Difficult to obtain, this is a rare book, not included in the standard edition of Stowe's Complete Works). Compare it to Aiken's adaptation.

Social Studies Topics for Discussion and Projects

1. Research and report on the lives of these famous people:
 - a. Nat Turner
 - b. Levi Coffin
 - c. Solomon Northrup
 - d. John C. Calhoun
 - e. Harriet Tubman
 - f. Eli Whitney
 - g. William Lloyd Garrison
 - h. Rev. John Rankin
 - i. Harriet Beecher Stowe
 - j. Elizabeth Stanton
 - k. Susan B. Anthony
 - l. Stephen Foster
 - m. Phyllis Wheatley
 - n. Edwin Booth
 - o. Grimke sisters
 - p. David Belasco
 - q. Elijah Lovejoy
 - r. Joseph Jefferson, III
2. Assign research projects on the following:
 - a. Abolitionists
 - b. Black Codes
 - c. Fugitive Slave Acts (1850)
 - d. Missouri Compromise
 - e. American Minstrels

- f. *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* (and its effects)
 - g. The Cotton Gin and Slavery
 - h. Slavery in the U.S.
 - i. Underground Railroad
 - j. Melodrama in the American theatre
3. Discuss the origins and changing meanings of the terms "an Uncle Tom" and "a real Simon Legree!"
 4. Discuss why Lincoln said, "So this is the little lady who started the big war!" when he met Harriet Beecher Stowe.
 5. Make a time line tracing the history of slavery in the United States.
 6. Make one of the following maps: a) A map showing the states that had abolished slavery by 1860 and those that still maintained it; b) A map showing the main routes and famous stations of the Underground Railroad in the United States prior to the Civil War.
 7. Keep a one-week diary as:
 - a. a Southern slaveowner
 - b. an Abolitionist
 - c. a slave escaping on the Underground Railroad a slave on the Louisiana plantation
 - d. a slave woman
 - e. a slave child
 - f. a visitor to a slave quarters on a plantation
 - g. the daughter of a slave owner/plantation owner Harriet Beecher Stowe in the 1850's
 - h. an actor in any period of American history
 8. Read the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass or Josiah Henson.
 9. Read and report on accounts by freed and escaped slaves.
 10. Read and report on accounts by American actors of their lives in the theatre.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The editor wishes to thank the following for permission to reprint selections from texts or pictures in their collections:

- Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., for Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-39*.
- Blume, Harvey, for permission to reprint the interview with Prof. H. L. Gates, Jr.
- Harriet Beecher Stowe House for picture of Legree beating Tom
- Museum of the City of New York, Theatre Collection, Brady Collection, auction scene.
- *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin. Copyright, 1955 by James Baldwin. Used by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.
- Oxford University Press for Wilson, *Patriotic Gore*
- Pilgrim, David, "Tom Caricatures," from the Jim Crow Museum, Ferris State University
- Simon & Schuster, Fiedler, *The Inadvertent Epic*.
- Theatre Collection, Astor & Tilden Foundations, N.Y.P.L.
- Railton, Stephen, director of the University of Virginia's comprehensive collection of materials on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Elizabeth Ammons is the Harriet H. Fay Professor of Literature at Tufts University. She is the author of *BRAVE NEW WORDS: HOW LITERATURE WILL SAVE THE PLANET*, *CONFLICTING STORIES: AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS AT THE TURN INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY*, and *EDITH WHARTON'S ARGUMENT WITH AMERICA*, as well as many articles, and has edited or co-edited a number of volumes, including *HARRIET BEECHER STOWE'S UNCLE TOM'S CABIN: A CASEBOOK*, *APPROACHES TO TEACHING STOWE'S UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*, and the *NORTON CRITICAL EDITION* of *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*.

Thomas Edison filmed a then current staged version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1903. The silent film is reproduced on our DVD.

Dr. Daniel Gerould is a professor of Theatre and Comparative Literature at the City University Graduate Center. He writes about twentieth century theatre and is the editor of the volume, *American Melodrama* (Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983) which includes a new edition of Aiken's *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*.

Dr. Errol G. Hill was the John D. Willard Professor of Drama and Oratory, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, until he retired in 1989. He was author and editor of several volumes of Caribbean Plays, author of *The Trinidad Carnival* (Texas Press, 1972) and editor of *Theater of Black Americans*, 2 vols. (Prentice Hall, 1980). As a scholar, academic, theater historian, playwright and director he was active and prolific right up until his death in 2003.

Dr. Vera M. Jiji has written the unsigned sections and has chosen and arranged the primary source materials and illustrations. She is Professor Emeritus of English at Brooklyn College. Her interest in the relationship between drama and society led to the creation of this program.

Dr. Glenn Loney (Editorial Consultant) was a professor of theatre at Brooklyn College and in the Theatre Ph.D. Program at the City University Graduate Center. His special interest is American Theatre History, and he was a founding member of the League of Historic American Theatres. A drama critic and theatre journalist, he edited an anthology of nineteenth century American dramas about the Far West.

Dr. William Eric Perkins has published widely in the field of Afro-American history.

Dr. David Pilgrim is Professor of Sociology at Ferris State University

Florence Polatnick taught Social Studies for twenty years, has done extensive curriculum work, conducted workshops, and acted as an educational consultant. In 1971, she was named outstanding teacher by the

National Council for Geographic Education. Author of two books on Africa and articles in professional journals, Mrs. Polatnick is now retired and keeps out of mischief by lecturing, giving in-service courses and writing.

Dr. Stephen Railton is a professor of English at the University of Virginia and director of the splendid website on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/index2f.html>

Dr. Gerald Warshaver was Humanities Scholar in Residence at Connecticut Public Radio. His prime research interest is in the relationship between literature and social history.

The Program for Culture at Play: Multimedia Studies in American Drama was sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. We issued studies of unjustly neglected American plays, such as Paulding's *The Lion of the West*, the Federal Theater's *One-third of a Nation* and this towering work. Along with this handbook, we have produced a DVD version of Aiken's *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* condensed for classroom use. DVDs and handbooks can be ordered through www.uncle-toms-cabin.org or, preferably, through Amazon.com