

# Lesson 1

## Part 1: "Old Kentucky Home"

### Objective

- To become acquainted with the plot and characters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

### Notes to the Teacher

If I could use a pen as you can," wrote Isabella Beecher to her sister-in-law during the debate over the Compromise of 1850, "I would write something that would make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is."

From that challenge came one of the best-known works of American literature and one of the few works of the imagination to influence the course of history. "I will write it if I live." Harriet Beecher Stowe grimly announced to her family in Brunswick, Maine. In somewhat over a year in 1851-1852. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had redeemed that pledge.

Like most of the works of Charles Dickens, the most popular English writer of Mrs. Stowe's day, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was introduced to the world in serial format in *The National Era*, a weekly antislavery newspaper published in Washington, D.C., by Gamaliel Bailey. It began in the issue of June 5, 1851, and appeared in irregular installments of one to three chapters until its conclusion forty-five chapters later on April 1, 1852. Even before the appearance of that final installment, the first hardcover edition of the novel had issued from the presses on March 20, 1852.

No doubt the demands of writing for deadlines contributed some of the spirit of spontaneous indignation which still crackles in the pages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but the novel also reveals the weaknesses of this method of construction. It is not a carefully plotted nor exquisitely polished work, and while the author claimed to have determined the fate of her central character early in the process of creation, she rather untidily tied together several plot strands that remained after Tom's death. Although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of the first novels to contain a subplot, the adventures of George and Eliza Harris are almost ignored after the first

third of the book, once Mrs. Stow became enthralled in the weaving of her main plot.

In this lesson, designed for reading the opening third of the book, students will review basic plot information and begin compiling a descriptive list of the main characters. (You may want to include Lesson 11's **Handout 26** at this time.) As a final activity, they are asked to identify characters from statements made by Mrs. Stowe in her explanatory follow-up. *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1854).

### Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 1**, before students begin the reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, so that students can answer the questions, as they read. Papers may be checked as reading progresses or at the end of chapter 14, when the papers are completed.

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<sup>1</sup>Kirkham, *The Budding of Uncle Tom's Cabin*. 64.





# Lesson 2

## The Peculiar Institution

### Objective

- To acquire knowledge of the historical background of the setting of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: slavery in the antebellum South

### Notes to the Teacher

"Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever," wrote Thomas Jefferson, himself a slaveholder, when contemplating the existence of slavery in the midst of the nation he had helped dedicate to the ideal of human liberty.' While the northern half of the United States gradually abolished slavery in the generation following the American Revolution, the invention of the cotton gin helped firmly entrench the institution in Jefferson's native South. After the emancipation of slaves in all British colonies in 1833, the American South and the Portuguese colony of Brazil were the only remaining strongholds of the "peculiar institution" in the Western World.

As maintained in the antebellum South, slavery was a means of race control as well as a labor system. Not all blacks were slaves, but all slaves were blacks, at least by legal definitions in which one-sixteenth or less of black blood determined one a Negro. Since slavery descended from the legal condition of the mother, many slaves were of mixed blood or mulattoes, often the property of their fathers. Although the African slave trade was abolished by the United States in 1808 (how effectively remains a point of contention among historians), an internal slave trade flourished in which excessive slaves from the older states of the Upper South were sold off to the still expansive cotton culture of the Deep South.

The condition of the slaves themselves was almost entirely dependent on the character and disposition of their masters, who under Southern law were given carte blanche over the welfare of their human property. Those in the more leisurely tobacco culture of the Upper South often fared better than those in the rawer, developing sugar and cotton regions of the Gulf States. Slaves on larger plantations were often

better off in their relative anonymity than their brethren on smaller units where the master might personally oversee their efforts. Older masters, with their fortunes made, were inclined to be more benevolent than younger ones still seeking theirs. While some slaves may have had relatively wholesome situations, the fact remains that a slave had absolutely no control over the conditions of his existence, nor any hope of bettering that condition through his own efforts. Even the best-run plantations produced their share of malcontents and runaways.

In its most extreme form, resistance to slavery took the form of slave plots and insurrections. A turning point in the Southern attitude towards slavery occurred in 1831, when Nat Turner led a particularly bloody rebellion in Virginia and William Lloyd Garrison began publishing his antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, in Massachusetts. Instead of openly debating the efficacy of its social system, the South turned inward upon itself and determined to uphold slavery as a positive good. It was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that revealed this closed society to the eyes of the world in 1852.

### Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 4** and **5**, quantitative data for students to use in discussion of the introductory material from Notes to the Teacher. Relate the background material to characters and events in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: To what kinds of plantations did Tom belong? What type of labor did he do?. etc.
2. Assign individual oral reports on various facets of slavery in the antebellum South. Suggested sources are listed in the Bibliography of this unit. Topics might include Plantation Routine, Slave Dress, Diet, and Dwellings, Slave Codes, Discipline and Punishment. Internal Slave Trade, Runaways, Slave Insurrections, and Free Negroes North and South.
3. Distribute **Handout 6**. Since a running debate

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Query : VIII: in Thomas Jefferson: Writings (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 289.

Growth of "King Cotton"	
1810	85,000,000 lbs.
1820 -	170,000,000 lbs.
1830	340,000,000 lbs.
1840	830,000,000 lbs. (400 lbs. = 1 bale)
1850	1,000,000,000 lbs.
1860	2,300,000,000 lbs. (3/4 of world supply)

Distribution of Slave Labor, 1850	
Hemp .....	60,000 hands
Rice .....	125,000 hands
Sugar .....	150,000 hands
Tobacco .....	350,000 hands
Cotton .....	1,815,000 hands
Total Agriculture .....	2,500,000 hands
Towns, cities, domestic (1860 est.) .....	500,000

<sup>1</sup>Ulrich Bunnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 211-212.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 49-50.

## The Social Pyramid of the Old South

**986,895 members of  
families holding 5 or  
more slaves**

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**931,230 members of  
families holding 1-4  
slaves**

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**6,120,825 non-  
slaveholding  
whites**

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**251,000 free blacks**

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**3,953,760 slaves**

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas A. **Bailey**, *The American Pageant A History of the Republic*, 4th ed. (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1971), 384.

## The Debate Over Slavery

**Directions:** Throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a running debate over the subject of slavery which is equally as important as the plot. All classes of characters-slave and free. Northerner and Southerner-have something to say about it. As you read the story, watch for these discussions on slavery and record some of the arguments, for and against, on the chart below.

**Proslavery Argument**

**Antislavery Argument**

**Follow-up exercise:** On the basis of your completed chart, write a paragraph explaining whether or not you believe Mrs. Stowe did justice to both sides of the slavery question in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

# Lesson 8

## A Woman's Place

### Objective

- To appreciate the feminine perspective from which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written

### Notes to the Teacher

It was a period in which a Massachusetts judge, doubtlessly congratulating himself on his liberalism, laid down the rule that no husband could beat his wife with any instrument thicker than his thumb.' Not the least of the accomplishments of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was that the period's most influential book should have been written by a woman in the midst of a male-dominated society. It is true that the more enlightened males tended to place women on a pedestal, but the concomitant of that enshrinement was that women so placed were expected to stay there. With *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe shattered at least one gender barrier in becoming the first American novelist, in the words of one scholar, to break away from the expectation that women should write almost exclusively for women, limiting themselves mainly to formulaic and conventional women's stories. "2

Though anything but a conventional women's story, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is suffused with a woman's insight. Its major indictment of slavery, the charge that it continually and inevitably violated the sacredness of domestic relations, was one particularly fit for a wife and mother to exploit. Moreover, it introduced readers to one of the most comprehensive casts of female characters in nineteenth-century American literature. These were real people with not a cardboard figure except the other-worldly Little Eva. Not all were saints. "The cult of the noble woman in nineteenth-century literature sometimes has a curious corollary." points out Thomas Gossett apropos to one of them. "When a woman is bad, she is horrid. "3 To whom he was referring should need no explanation.

This lesson opens with a pair of background readings on woman's status in nineteenth-century America. one from an outside source and the other from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Students are then encouraged to extract some of the novel's feminine insights in an activity on characters and theme. The lesson concludes with the concept of Uncle Tom as a hero, combining feminine traits with the more overt masculine ones, a focus which prepares for the later discussion of the changing image of Uncle Tom.

### Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 17**, Part 1. for students to read silently or orally. Refer students to the conversation between W. and Mrs. Shelby before Aunt Chloe appears in chapter 21 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This reading could be dramatized by three students reading the lines for Mrs. Shelby, W. Shelby, and the narrator.

Ask students to complete **Handout 17**, Part 2, containing questions on the foregoing readings. Follow with class discussion of responses.

<sup>1</sup>Alice Felt Tyler. *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History*. (New York: Harper Torchbooks. 1962). 426.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Ammons, 'Stowe's Black Maternal Christ, Tom,' Vera JUI (ed.; *Drama George L Aiken, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Brooklyn Multimedia Stud*

<sup>3</sup>Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, 131.

**A**

## Man's World

**Directions:** The extraordinary success achieved by Harriet Beecher Stowe with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is all the more remarkable when one considers the limitations placed upon American women in the nineteenth century. Read below David Dudley Field's summary of woman's legal status in 1860. Reread the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Shelby in chapter 21 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Answer the questions in Part 2.

**Part 1.            A summary of laws relating to married women by David Dudley Field**

A married woman cannot sue for her services, as all she earns legally belongs to the husband, whereas his earnings belong to himself, and the wife legally has no interest in them. Where children have property and both parents are living, the father is the guardian. In case of the wife's death without a will, the husband is entitled to all her personal property and to a life interest in the whole of her real estate to the entire exclusion of her children, even though this property may have come to her through a former husband and the children of that marriage still be living. If a husband die without a will, the widow is entitled to one-third of the personal property and to a life interest in one-third only of the real estate. In case a wife be personally injured, either in reputation by slander, or in body by accident, compensation must be recovered in the point name of herself and her husband, and when recovered it belongs to him....The father may by deed or will appoint a guardian for the minor children, who may thus be taken entirely away from the jurisdiction of the mother at his death. . . ,        **'Tyler. Freedom's Ferment, 426.**

## Visual Symbols

### Part 2.

1. List three examples of unequal treatment of men and women from the summary by Field.

<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
a _____	a _____
b _____ _____	b _____ _____
c. _____ _____	c. _____ _____

2. List two ways in which the law erected barriers between a woman and her own children.

a.

b.

3. In view of her legal status, what conclusion might one make concerning a woman who entered the state of marriage in nineteenth-century America?

4. What was the attitude of Mr. Shelby concerning a woman's aptitude for business?



## Feminine Intuition

### Directions:

**Part A** As a writer who happened to be female, Harriet Beecher Stowe may have had a special insight into her female characters. On the chart below, note some of the key attributes of the female characters listed. Try to balance positive with negative characteristics.

Mrs. Shelby	Eliza Hams Chloe
Mary Bird	Dinah
Rachel Halliday	
Marie St. Clare	Topsy
Ophelia St. Clare	Cassy

# Lesson 9

## Part 3: "Over Jordan"

### Objective

- To review and consider the characters, events, and plot resolutions of the final section of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

### Notes to the Teacher

Not until the final third of the book does the real villain of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* make his appearance, but he makes up for late entrance with a vengeance. In fact, so good is slave owner Simon Legree at his villainy, that his name has entered the dictionary as a synonym for "any relentless taskmaster." *Uncle Tom's Cabin* thus has the rare distinction of placing both its hero and its villain in the dictionary as symbolic types, though Mrs. Stowe might hesitate to agree with the modern interpretation placed upon her hero. She saw the confrontation between Tom and Legree as the classic conflict between good and evil, with good inevitably gaining the triumph, even if not in this world.

Though she did not flinch at bringing Tom to a tragic if triumphant end, her solution to the slavery problem struck some of her contemporaries as an evasion. In her neglected subplot, she sees George and Eliza Harris safely to Canada but then lets George, after pursuing an education in France, elect to go to Liberia, the African republic specifically established as a haven for former American slaves. According to her critics, she seemed to say that emancipation need pose no anxieties for whites, North or South, because the freed blacks would choose to pursue their destinies in the land of their origin. Whether or not that was truly her message at the time, she apparently held little brief for the colonization movement thereafter.

With the introduction of Cassy and Emmeline, Stowe pursued, if not explicitly, the subject of slavery's transgressions against marriage and the family. She indulges the reader's hopes, as the two women make good their escape. Cassy is revealed as Eliza's mother, while George Harris finds his long-lost sister in a series of coincidences. A final convention is observed in the "Concluding Remarks," where, in the words of

one scholar, "she mounted the pulpit and, in best Beecher fashion, preached."

Besides the activity on plot resolutions, this lesson asks students to categorize Tom's three owners and offers the author's interpretation on the meaning of Tom's resistance to Legree.

### Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 20** so that students may answer the questions as they read chapters **29-45**.

Suggested Responses:

<sup>1</sup>Kirkham. *The Building of Uncle Tom's Cabin*. 138.



4. What is the background of Simon Legree? Where is his plantation? at kind of plantation is it? What is the significance of the fact that Legree was a New Englander?
  
5. Who is Emmeline. and why was she purchased by Legree?
  
6. What causes the first **confrontation** between Tom and Legree (**chapter 40**)?
  
7. Why does Tom decline to join Cassy and Emmeline in their plan to escape?
  
8. What causes the second confrontation between Tom and Legree (**chapter 33**) What is its result? Why can't Legree be punished for his deed?
  
9. Who do Emmeline and Cassy meet on their way North? Who does Madame de Thoux turn out to be? Who does Cassy turn out to be?
  
10. What does George Shelby do when he returns to Kentucky? What does George Harris do?

## Lesson 10

# The Impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

### Objective

- To realize the magnitude of the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* its effect on the history of its time

### Notes to the Teacher

Nothing like it had ever been seen in the history of American publishing. Within eight weeks, 50,000 copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been sold. Within a year, the total exceeded 300,000. It was published in the U.S.A. by J.P. Jewett & Co. in editions costing from 37 1/2 cents to \$2.50. In England, various pirated editions soon totaled more than one million copies. Diverse commercial products tried to profit from the book's popularity, from theme restaurants in Europe to an "Uncle Tom and Little Eva" card game for children in America. In the South at least a score of novels were written in reply, under such titles as *Liberia, Mr. Peyton's Experiments, Aunt Phillis's Cabin, and Uncle Robin and His Cabin in Virginia*. None approached the fame of the original, which was translated into thirty-seven languages. Eventually, in America alone, more than three million copies were sold, second only to the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

Yet even this success paled compared to that achieved by the dramatic version, or versions, which began appearing shortly after the book's debut. The most famous, that by George L. Aiken, was opened by the George C. Howard Company in Troy, New York, on November 15, 1852. Eventually there were minstrel variations, spectacles with live animals and steamboat races, and even versions with happy endings. In the 1890s, an estimated 500 "Tommer" troops with 3-5 actors specialized in performances of a drama version. "A Tommer' never played anything but a Tom show," recalled theater historian Harlowe Hoyt.

A girl started out as Little Eva. If it was a boy they clapped a blond wig on him and nobody was the wiser. A feminine Little Eva graduated into Topsy. When the

demands of this part became too exacting, she might become Eliza, or Mrs. St. Clare. or Aunt Ophelia, depending upon physique and countenance. Or if she was very bad, they made her play Cassy.<sup>2</sup>

The various dramatic corruptions of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel bore a large share of the responsibility for the negative image of the hero that surfaced in the twentieth century.

But, in its own day, the novel was credited with making a profound impact. Everyone has heard of the author's interview with Abraham Lincoln shortly before the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, when the president greeted her with the remark that became her literary epitaph: "So this is the little lady who made this great war." His quick quip was given scholarly credibility by historian James Ford Rhodes, who concluded that "Of the literary forces that aided in bringing about the immense revolution in public sentiment between 1852 and 1860, we may affirm with confidence that by far the most weighty was the influence spread abroad by this book."<sup>3</sup>

### Procedure

1. Ask the class to suggest examples of "megabit" works of art or entertainment from today's culture (*Batman* in the movies; *Les Miserables* on Broadway; *The Simpsons* on television). Discuss some of the manifestations that might determine "megabit" status: box office returns, rave reviews, commercial spinoffs, etc.
2. Distribute **Handout 23** containing two original reviews of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for students to read and to answer the accompanying questions.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Because the author is a woman*
2. *As a "termagant virago or the foul-mouthed hag*

<sup>1</sup>John Tebbel, *The Media in America* (New York: Mentor Books, 1974), 136-139. <sup>2</sup>Harlowe R. Hoyt, *Town Hall Tonight* (New York: Bramhall House, 1955) 57-58.

<sup>3</sup>James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United State from the Compromise of 1850 to the McKinsey-Bryan Campaign of 1896* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920), Vol. 1, 278-279.

# Lesson 11

## The Legacy of Uncle Tom's Cabin

### Objective

- To understand how a symbolic figure can have differing meanings for different generations

### Notes to the Teacher

While the reputations of many literary classics have experienced cyclical ups and downs through periods of changing standards and tastes, few have matched the roller coaster ride taken by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Credited in the nineteenth century by Lincoln and James Ford Rhodes with instigating the struggle that brought freedom to the slaves, the book within a century saw its hero become a term of opprobrium among the grandchildren of these same slaves. According to a modern dictionary, "Uncle Tom" is synonymous with "a Negro who is abjectly servile or deferential to whites."

To a certain extent, the problem was endemic in Mrs. Stowe's creation. "With the noblest of intentions," stated one scholar. "Harriet Beecher Stowe created a Jekyll-and-Hyde character that contained the seeds of its own destruction." Jekyll, of course, was the idealized Christian slave with an infinite capacity for love, who turned the other cheek and forgave his enemies. Hyde was the other side of the same [coin](#). an essentially passive, excessively humble character, based to some degree on racial stereotypes, whose meekness might even bring into question his capacity for freedom.

Historians agree, however, that it was the stage character that completed the corruption of Uncle Tom. In refusing to approve an authorized dramatic version, out of a Puritanical aversion to the theater. Stowe surrendered any possibility of influencing the content of the many unauthorized versions. Playing to a more popular-and prejudiced-audience, the stage Toms were invariably portrayed as old, quavering lackeys rather than Stowe's strong, mature plantation foreman. Given to singing self-pitying spirituals and occasionally breaking into dance.

they were a foreshadowing of the obsequious Step in Fetchit of the movies.

Blacks always had ambivalent feelings about Uncle Tom, appreciating the book's role in hastening the day of emancipation but sensing the character's unsuitability as a role model in a realistic world. When the civil rights movement entered its militant phase after World War II, the reaction against Uncle Tom was swift and reflexive. It was also somewhat unfair to Mrs. Stowe's original conception of Tom. Recent efforts to rehabilitate Uncle Tom have been led largely by white critics, whose views were summarized by Thomas F. Gossett:

Properly understood, they argue, the racism is not sufficient to invalidate the novel, and they conclude that Stowe was able not merely to analyze perceptively but to present credible characters, black and white, reacting to a monstrous institution.<sup>2</sup>

### Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 26** in advance of the lesson, perhaps even in Lesson 1, since it requires students to cull the entire novel for instances of racism. Although the term "racism" is defined on the handout, discussion of the concept might also be enlightening. Review some of the racist attitudes noted by students distinguishing between those expressed by the characters and those which might be attributed to the author. Encourage discussion on the question: How did Mrs. Stowe's attitudes measure up in general with the prevalent attitudes of her time?

Suggested Responses:

Errol Hill. -The Case Against *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.- Vera Jijl (a George L Aiken. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Brooklyn. N.Y.: Multimec 'Gossett. *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. 410-41 1.

## Racial Stereotyping in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

**Directions:** Since American slavery was based almost entirely upon race, the concept of racism is an inescapable part of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Guided by the dictionary definition below, try to document as many instances of racist ideas as you can find in Harriet Beecher Stowe's work. As you enter them on the chart, try to differentiate between those ideas attributed to fictitious characters and those which you think might be attributed to the author.

*Racism* -a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's race is superior and has the right to rule others.<sup>3</sup>

Examples from Characters			Examples from Author
<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Name</u> _____	<u>Idea</u> _____	<u>Instance</u>

S  
•  
  
a  
a  
•  
•  
•

## The Strange Career of Uncle Tom

### Part 1

A "classic" is a work of art that demonstrates great "staying power" beyond its own time. That does not mean that it necessarily holds the same meaning for every generation. The following two readings exemplify how the opinions of American blacks towards Stowe's Uncle Tom have changed over the years.

**"Harriet Beecher Stowe"  
by Paul Laurence Dunbar**

She told the story, and the whole world wept

At wrongs and cruelties it had not known  
But for this fearless woman's voice along.  
She spoke to consciences that long had slept: Her

message, Freedom's clear reveille, swept

From heedless hovel to complacent throne.  
Command and prophecy were in the tone,  
And from its sheath the sword of justice leapt.

Around two peoples swelled a fiery wave.

But both came forth transfigured from the flame.

Blest be the hand that dared be strong to save. And blest  
be she who in our weakness came-

Prophet and priestess! At one stroke she gave A  
race to freedom, and herself to fame.'

**"In 'Uncle Tom' Are Our Guilt and Hope"  
by Ales Haley**

In Akron, Ohio, recently a local Negro political and civic leader, Mrs. Bertha B. Moore, brought suit for libel against a Negro weekly newspaper, *The Cleveland Call and Post*, for printing a "false report" that she had been called an "Uncle Tom." In Chester, Pa., a Negro clergyman, the Rev. Donald G. Ming, is pressing libel charges against the leader of a local school-integration drive for having called him an "Uncle Tom." Mrs. Moore won her suit-and \$32,000 in damages-with an all-white jury. As of this writing, the Rev. Mr. Ming's case is pending.

What specifically does the term mean, to produce among Negroes such emotional reactions?

In Mrs. Moore's courtroom testimony, it meant: "A Negro who sells out other Negroes for money, public recognition or political preference." The defendant newspaper objected that "Uncle Tom" implied no disloyalty to associates, but merely indicated "one with whom you disagree."

A more all-embracing definition than either offered is: "A Negro accused by another of comporting himself among white people in a manner which the accuser interprets as servile or cowardly: or a Negro who other Negroes feel has betrayed, or sullied, in any way. a dignified, militant, forthright Negro image." "Tomming" is the verb form. About the only synonym is "handkerchief head." much less frequently used.

Mrs. Moore. explaining for the white jurors some background. said, "'Uncle Tom' originally was a deeply religious, subservient hero in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*)-but the meaning of the words has changed over the years." More precisely. the attitude of the American Negro toward an "Uncle Tom" image is what has undergone a radical change. To trace this development requires some review.

Mrs. Stowe's hero is a white-haired, pious, loyal slave-foreman. Though warned that he is about to be sold, he feels it against his Christian principles to run away. While being shipped downriver, he leaps overboard and saves from drowning a wealthy man's small daughter, Little Eva. The grateful father buys Uncle Tom, and in a New Orleans mansion the old slave and the angelic child read the Bible and sing hymns. Then Little Eva develops tuberculosis. Dying, she extracts her father's promise to free Uncle Tom.

But, too soon, the grieving father is killed in a brawl. His widow sells all her slaves to the cruel, Yankee-born slave dealer, Simon Legree. Ordered by Legree to flog another slave, Uncle Tom refuses, on Christian grounds, and himself is **flogged**. Then Legree threatens to beat him to death unless he tells where some escaped slaves are hiding. Uncle Tom. who does not know the hiding place, begs Legree to avoid damning himself through needless cruelty. Legree has the fatal beating administered, as Uncle Tom prays to God to forgive Legree... .

The novel, published in March, 1852. leaped to a global renown. Abraham Lincoln is said to have remarked wryly to Mrs. Stow that she started the Civil **War**

Mrs. Stowe prophetically feared that dramatization of her book by the then "sinful" theater very likely would vulgarize her work's intended Christian purpose. In 1852, theatrical producers could adapt any published fiction without the author's permission. And that year did see the beginning of a spate of terrible caricatured "Uncle Tom" shows on their way to becoming, in theatrical terms, as phenomenally successful as the book.

These productions retained only the most sob-soaked scenes, mortared together with "nigger minstrel" dances and lyrics. Little Eva ascending heavenward on a white dove was counterposed against a monkeylike, unbelievably stupid pickaninny, Topsy. Though Mrs. Stowe wrote of no dogs, the theater invented the classic chase of Eliza crossing the ice. British companies added a scene in which Simon Legree with dogs closed in on a runaway slave, with horrible off-stage noises as the pack mangled their quarry. And always in the major role, of course, was a grinning, bowing, praying. forever-forgiving. woolly-headed "Uncle Tom."

For generations, hundreds of "Tom" companies played and replayed every American city and hamlet outside the South. Translations by the dozens thrived no less in the homelands of countless future American immigrants. When finally, in the nineteen-twenties, automobiles and movies killed history's most

successful theatrical venture, some 70 years of repetition had infected the Western world with an incalculably poisonous "Topsy" and "Uncle Tom" image of the American Negro.

In this century's early decades, when most negroes lived in the South. "Tomming" represented a practical means of coexisting with the dominant whites, in communities where a Negro even suspected of being at odds with Southern customs was in big trouble. Millions of Southern-reared Negroes, including migrants to the North, simply and pragmatically adopted the grinning, feet-scuffing, head-scratching, "Yassuh-boss" masquerade. They found that both Southern and Northern whites, amused and psychologically disarmed, automatically were more cooperative in granting or supplying the Negroes' usually meager wants.

Not only the uneducated Negroes, among themselves, chuckled at "fooling white folks." In Southern Negro schools, including colleges, no principal or president long existed without some adroitness in "Tomming," however finessed. How thoroughly philanthropy and "Tomming" became married-and remained so-is illustrated in a recent incident related by Louis Lomax in his book *The Negro Revolt*. Lomax tells how a Negro college president delivered a careful presentation for vital funds before an audience of white patrons. At the end, one woman rose and asked if he would sing the old Negro spiritual "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." The astounded college president, collecting himself, sang-and went home with his needed \$50,000.

It is unfortunate that more of both Southern and Northern whites, or at least their leaders, did not perceive the danger of the white illusion that Negroes were "satisfied" with living peripherally in a "second-class" status. The result today is the emotional revolt of the Negro masses advancing rapidly-sometimes even irrationally-against whatever is interpreted to smack of the Old "Uncle Tom" image. It is in this climate and mood that Negroes have made the words "Uncle Tom" a traitor like indictment. White people, quoting what some Negro has said to them in private, can cause other Negroes to indict him as an "Uncle Tom"- for having, say, tended to support a "go-slow" attitude. But actually to document an "Uncle Tom" is impossible. He exists only in his accuser's subjective opinion. There has been scarcely a single Negro leader whom the "Uncle Tom" charge has not stung. The most generally recognized Negro leader ever in America was Dr. Booker T. Washington. At the same time that he enjoyed the respect if not the admiration of most whites, and the reverence of most Negroes, Dr. Washington was being bitterly attacked as an "accommodating Uncle Tom" by a powerful, militant intellectual camp of Negroes led by the late Dr. W.E.B. DuBois.

And hurled in turn at Dr. DuBois and his camp, in the nineteen-twenties, was the denunciation: "Uncle Toms ... weak-kneed, cringing sycophants to the white man," by the fiery Black Nationalist leader, Marcus Aurelius Garvey, whose huge "Back to Africa" movement lured millions of Negroes.

The counterpart to Garvey's movement now would be the Black Muslims. That organization's chief spokesman until recently, Malcolm X, has "Uncle Tommed" practically every Negro leader in the nation. He sometimes pins the label upon whole categories. Negro ministers he has assailed as "the Rev. Uncle Toms . . . parroting the white man's religion." His "Dr. Uncle Thomases, Ph.D." he applies, at large, to Negro intellectuals. In "those black bodies with white

heads" he implies that the Negroes of the N.A.A.C.P., the Urban League and similar agencies are "Uncle Toms" for permitting white chairmen or presidents to be their "brains."

And if one listens to some of the street-corner incendiaries who are haranguing crowds in such ghettos as Harlem and South Side Chicago today, it should not be at all surprising to hear "Uncle Toms!" flung at even the Black Muslims.

The tensions that are building in the ghettos of America's large cities signal an increasing mass of truculent Negroes, among whom are many quick to fling "Uncle Tom" at any suspicion of lagging militancy by even the most dedicated Negro leaders. The charge, if it sticks, is so professionally fatal that a significant joke, popular among Negroes, depicts an ousted leader running alongside a marching line, pleading: "How'm I going to lead if you don't tell me where you're going?"... .

Privately, not a few Negro leaders do wish that there was somewhat less demand for a regular faze of headline-making, "dramatic" statements and actions. These consume time that might be more effectively spent in quiet, tough, statesmanlike bargaining, behind the scenes, with local and national white power structures ... .

Mrs. Stowe's novel, for all its faults, is redeemed by the fact that it helped to end the institution of slavery. It is a deep irony that, a century later, the very name of Mrs. Stowe's hero is the worst insult the slaves' descendants can hurl at one another out of their frustrations in seeking what all other Americans take for granted.

Both the guilt and the hope of America, then, are inherent in "Uncle Tom"-the guilt of slavery and the hope that the day will come when white men, honestly, will fling the epithet "Uncle Tom" at the Negro who does not stand up as a man among men.'

## Part 2

1. For what does poet Paul Dunbar give Harriet Beecher Stowe credit?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What goes unmentioned in Dunbar's poem? Do you see any significance in that fact?

<sup>5</sup>*The New York Times Magazine*, 1 March 1964. 23.

