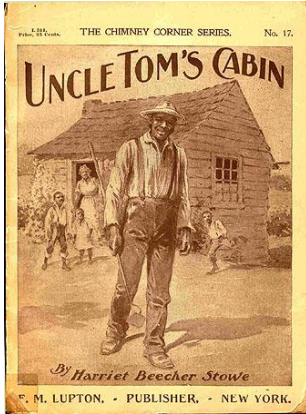


# Uncle Tom's Cabin & Harriet Beecher Stowe

Background: Uncle Tom's Cabin was first published March 20, 1852. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the novel in response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which required the citizens in Northern states to return escaped slaves to the South. Uncle Tom's Cabin was not the first antislavery novel, but it was by far the most successful. The novel sold 10,000 copies in the first week and 300,000 by the end of the first year. Within two years it had sold 2,000,000 copies worldwide. Stowe's main argument had little to do with racial equality. Her arguments centered on religion and the sanctity of motherhood and family. These, she felt, were the arguments most likely to affect public opinion in the North.



Harriet Beecher Stowe explains in the last chapter why she wrote the book (she calls herself "the author"). "For many years of her life, the author avoided all reading upon or allusion to the subject of slavery, considering it as too painful to be inquired into, and one which advancing light and civilization would certainly live down. But, since the legislative act of 1850, when she heard, with perfect surprise and consternation, Christian and humane people actually recommending the remanding escaped fugitives into slavery, as a duty binding on good citizens,—when she heard, on all hands, from kind, compassionate and estimable people, in the free states of the North, deliberations and discussions as to what Christian duty could be on this head,—she could only think, These men and Christians cannot know what slavery is; if they did, such a question could never be open for discussion. And from this arose a desire to exhibit it in a living dramatic reality."

"The writer has given only a faint shadow, a dim picture, of the anguish and despair that are, at this very moment, riving thousands of hearts, shattering thousands of families, and driving a helpless and sensitive race to frenzy and despair. There are those living who know the mothers whom this accursed traffic has driven to the murder of their children; and themselves seeking in death a shelter from woes more dreaded than death ... "And you, mothers of America ... I beseech you, pity the mother who has all your affections, and not one legal right to protect, guide, or educate, the child of her bosom! ... I beseech you, pity those mothers that are constantly made childless by the American slave-trade! And say, mothers of America, is this a thing to be defended, sympathized with, passed over in silence? Do you say that the people of the free state have nothing to do with it, and can do nothing? Would to God this were true! But it is not true. The people of the free states have defended, encouraged, and participated; and are more guilty for it, before God, than the South, in that they have not the apology of education or custom. "If the mothers of the free states had all felt as they should, in times past, the sons of the free states would not have been the holders, and, proverbially, the hardest masters of slaves ... "... You pray for the heathen abroad; pray also for the heathen at home. And pray for those distressed Christians whose whole chance of religious improvement is an accident of trade and sale; from whom any adherence to the morals of Christianity is, in many cases, an impossibility, unless they have given them, from above, the courage and grace of martyrdom."

"Mas'r Legree, as ye bought me, I'll be a true and faithful servant to ye. I'll give ye all the work of my hands, all my time, all my strength; but my soul I won't give up to mortal man. I will hold on to the Lord, and put his commands before all,—die or live; you may be sure on 't. Mas'r Legree, I an't a grain afeard to die. I'd as soon die as not. Ye may whip me, starve me, burn me,—it'll only send me sooner where I want to go."

Source: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In this passage, Tom is speaking to Simon Legree [his slaveowner] after he is punished for refusing to beat another slave. The passage shows Tom's devotion to any owner he has, even evil ones, but no one can be stronger to the devotion he has for the Lord.