

Reception: texts, readers, audiences, history

Vol. 2 (Summer, 2010)

<http://www.English.udel.edu/RSSsite/rssjournal.html>

Copyright©Reception Study Society

Barbara Hochman, "Devouring *Uncle Tom's Cabin* : Black Readers
between Plessy vs Ferguson and Brown vs Board of Education"

"There was something about that book. I couldn't understand it. He
just read it over and over and over again"

Emma Berdis Joynes Baldwin (mother of James Baldwin)

During the last twenty years, with the burgeoning of reception studies, reading studies and the history of the book, scholars have devoted serious attention to the way "underrepresented" and "understudied" groups have used books, newspapers, and periodicals to gain cultural competence and to understand their own position in society.¹ As this multifaceted project proceeds, historians of reading have become increasingly sensitive to the difficulties of finding evidence for "so elusive a practice as reading" (McHenry 7) and to the challenge of contextualizing and interpreting that evidence, especially when it is skimpy, eclectic, or outside the framework of published reviews and other institutional practices (e.g. schools, libraries, or book clubs). Elizabeth

McHenry has called for "new ways of looking at the multiple uses of literature" in African American communities to gain "a more accurate and historically informed understanding of a complex and differentiated population" (14). Drawing on the work of McHenry, Karla F.C.

Holloway, and other historians of reading, this essay examines the unique meaning of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for African Americans between the 1890s and the 1950s, when the ongoing repercussions of the Civil War and the failure of Reconstruction were intensified by legalized segregation.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was an extremely important book for black readers in the years between the court decision *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), which made segregation legal, and *Brown vs Board of Education* (1954), which reversed that decision. In the intervening period, when many free young African Americans were the children or grand-children of ex-slaves, information about slavery was paradoxically scarce. In the public sphere, slave narratives "virtually disappeared from American cultural memory for over a century" as W.J.T. Mitchell notes (189).² Ex-slaves themselves, eager to move on, were reluctant to hand down stories of their experiences to their children. In this context *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an eye-opener for young black readers who were hungry for information about their family's past and about slavery in general. In 1944 when the Federal Writers Project gave scholars access to ten thousand pages of interviews with former slaves, slave narratives started to be

published again.³ Soon the Civil Rights movement began. At this point the meaning and function of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* changed radically once more, at least for professional readers. James Baldwin's famous critique of Stowe, published in *Partisan Review* in 1949, ushered in an era during which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was either attacked or neglected. When white feminist scholars gave the book a new lease on life a generation later, Baldwin's attack remained a touchstone for black anger at Stowe, as if his understanding of her novel summed up the African American response. Yet other black readers, from the 1890s through the 1940s, read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* differently. In fact, Baldwin's essay does not fully represent his own experience of reading the novel. As a child Baldwin read it "obsessively" and "compulsively" by his own account (*Devil* 10, 14). As an adult he revisited the book several times.

Using Fiction: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the Black Reading List

From Frederick Douglass through Henry Louis Gates, African American writers have overwhelmingly affirmed the ideology of literacy; their autobiographies often become a space to foreground faith in reading among their credentials as full-fledged participants in the racialized literary culture of the U.S.⁴ As Holloway has shown, black writers have regularly avoided "lengthy lists of black books" in autobiographical accounts of what they read (135, 184). Conversely, "white" classics play

an important role in narratives that are often designed to demonstrate a black reader's discernment and sophistication. Although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was widely regarded as a classic by the 1890s, it was a problematic choice for an African American booklist.

In the course of the nineteenth century, African Americans who espoused faith in reading accepted and even intensified the governing cultural ambivalence about fiction in general. As McHenry shows, the black press in the antebellum period consistently emphasized the "difference between a program of 'solid' reading and the informal, relaxed reading implied by the nature of fiction and other 'fanciful and imaginative' texts" (104). African American stories of reading tend to affirm the author's consumption of books for practical and intellectual rewards, not idle pleasures. Late-nineteenth-century white commentators prioritized literary study, useful reading, and European classics; the African American community, plagued by the need to counter widely-shared, racialized assumptions about black laziness and intellectual inferiority, was particularly hesitant about legitimizing the imaginative pleasures and diversion offered by fiction. Although some black literary societies of the 1890s defended novel reading, provided that novels were chosen selectively and read discriminately, others insisted that literature was to be read for "refinement" rather than "amusement" or endorsed literature "that would help prepare African Americans to more fully

address their racially and socially defined concerns" (McHenry 169, 172-73, 229-38). Booker T. Washington makes a characteristic bid for both cultural superiority and social relevance when he claims, in *Up From Slavery* (1901), that he prefers newspapers or biography – i.e. "reality" -- to fiction (129). Kathryn Johnson, a black itinerant bookseller of the 1920s, asserted that her customers did not "want fiction. They look at such a book and say 'it's only a story,' and put it down. They want to spend their earnings for reality"(qtd. in McHenry 11; see also Coulter).

Despite (and because of) the novel's growing popularity, resistance to fiction persisted among many educators, librarians, and other cultural arbiters well into the twentieth century. When James Russell Lowell identified "The Five Indispensable Authors" in 1894, his list was comprised of Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe and Cervantes—no Americans, and hardly a novelist. The selection was typical of literary culture in this period.⁵ Nevertheless, many African Americans, like other U. S. readers at the time, benefited from the increasing availability of fiction and its persistent, if uneven, rise in cultural status. Ida B. Wells assigned fiction an important role in her adolescent reading, as if a refuge from reality could be as significant as useful knowledge. "I could forget my troubles in no other way," she writes of the "long winter evenings" when, as a lonely teenager with a teaching job in Memphis, she read Dickens, Louisa May Alcott, Charlotte Bronte, and Oliver Optic

(*Crusade* 22). From Ida B. Wells through Marita Golden, black writers have read "white" fiction for diversion and escape. Growing up in Washington, DC, in the 1950s, Golden found "comfort and salvation" in *Vanity Fair*, *Tom Jones*, *Oliver Twist*, and Jane Austen. "Books simply saved me," she wrote (8). British fiction (like the private attic space in which she read it) provided Golden with a refuge from "the perplexities and strains of her family" as Holloway notes (22). But long novels about other times and places also offered Golden some escape from encroaching awareness of racial tensions in Washington ("scarred by Jim Crow laws") and perhaps from her father's "bitter, frightening tales of slavery" handed down via his "great-grandparents, from memories that refused to be mute" (Golden 6, 4). Golden's book is dedicated to her father "who told me the stories that matter" and her "mother who taught me to remember them." At times, Fielding, Scott, Thackeray and Dickens must have been a welcome alternative to those more pressing tales.

For a black writer to include *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on an autobiographical "booklist" between the 1890s and the 1950s was quite different not only from including canonized dramatists and poets such as Shakespeare, Dante, or Goethe but also from including novelists such as Fielding, Scott, or Dickens – not to speak of Sinclair Lewis or Theodore Dreiser.⁶ A black writer citing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at this time was in an especially difficult position. For one thing, Stowe's status in literary

culture declined as sentiment gave way to realism, then to modernism. For another, in Darryl Pinckney's words, "people wanted to put the years of strife behind them" (xxii). In addition, a black writer's affirmation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* could be interpreted as a kind of toadying--paying homage to the "little lady who started the great war" while overlooking her racialized stereotypes. Still, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appears on the booklists of many well-known African Americans in the segregation years. It is repeatedly mentioned in journals, autobiographies, and other writing by James Weldon Johnson, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, James Baldwin, and others. Both the novel and a biography of Stowe, written by her son Charles, appear on lists of books the black press recommended for "students of the Negro Problem and general readers. Your library will be incomplete without a selection from this up-to-date list" (Advertisement).⁷ Stowe is well represented in the book collection of William Carl Bolivar, African American bibliophile and community historian in Philadelphia who, until his death in 1914, devoted himself to documenting African American social and cultural history through acquisition of books, newspapers, and other printed materials.⁸ In 1952 Dodd, Mead and Company published an edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with introductory remarks and captions by Lanston Hughes.

Many black readers were powerfully drawn to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the first half of the twentieth century. When Mary Wilson Starling

wrote a PhD thesis on "The Slave Narrative" at New York University in 1946, the topic of slavery was woefully neglected by scholars. For Starling, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a model of both literary value and social impact, inextricably intertwined with the history of slavery. Starling's dissertation, a project of historical reconstruction, was published in 1981 as *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*. In an "Author's Prologue" she explains that her parents were upset by her work. Like angry black readers who wrote to Tony Morrison after *Song of Solomon* appeared, asking Morrison why she wrote about magic, incest, violence and other matters that had nothing to do with them,⁹ Starling's parents were embarrassed by the material she was bringing to light. For many years she "kept her work from publication, though with an aching heart," out of "deference to [her] family" and awareness that her parents were uncomfortable with her research into the slave past (xxiv).

Starling's parents were also embarrassed by her grandfather, a former slave and living reminder of the world he came from. In her "Prologue" Starling emphasizes her respect for this grandfather and her fascination with the very stories that her parents did not want to hear. She recalls her grandfather's description of "the day when 'Master' had brought all the slaves together in the 'Big House,' and had told them that they were 'free.'" In the pandemonium that followed, her grandfather, then ten years old, was pushed aside, relegated to standing alone and not

understanding what was going on. When he suddenly realized," Starling says, "that the slave-holder was walking toward him yelling, 'You are FREE, I told you!' my grandfather jumped back in fright, and crashed into the large hall mirror behind him" (xxiii). This tiny narrative – so different from official homage to emancipation – dramatically captures some of the emotional turmoil, confusion, and incomprehension that accompanied the end of the slave era. Starling's research was designed precisely to peer beneath historical accounts that focus on the triumph of abolition and the "emancipation moment."¹⁰ The figure of Stowe is a looming presence throughout her study; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has both historical and aesthetic significance for her. "A crusade is again in progress," she writes by way of conclusion, "this time for the purpose of emancipating humankind from the neurosis of racial prejudice. A Mrs. Stowe is again needed to fuse the Negro's story and the imaginings of wishful thinkers" (310).

In 1946, when Starling completed her PhD thesis, segregation was a powerfully entrenched legal practice; its demise was difficult to imagine. The court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education* was eight years away and would be only the first significant sign of slow changes to come. Perhaps as a graduate student, Starling was under some pressure to celebrate Stowe. Yet Stowe's standing in literary culture of the 1940s was particularly low. Jonathan Arac claims that the forties were the only time

that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was out of print (92).¹¹ Starling herself is often critical of Stowe. Discussing an article written by the Reverend Ephraim Peabody in 1849 ("probably the best essay that has been written on the 'Narratives of Fugitive Slaves'") Starling adds, "Mrs. Stowe's guardian angel should have looked to the destruction of all copies of this [article] . . . upon the death of that gifted lady, for it is quite evident from her perfect silence concerning Peabody in her elaborate and 'complete' *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* that she intended to keep the secret of the influence of that article upon her" (238). However, both Starling's criticism and praise of Stowe reflect her belief in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an extremely important book. Other black readers of the period agreed.

The comments of African American readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the age of segregation should not be taken as constituting a monolithic "African American reading experience," but certain remarks recur often enough to suggest some typicality. Although most of the comments analyzed below are by writers and intellectuals, these readers possessed various levels of education and sophistication when they first encountered the novel. Many were raised in working-class families. Starling's grandfather was a janitor; her father was organist of a tabernacle in Zion, Illinois. Her mother "dreamed" that her daughter would become a high school English teacher and "never forgave [her] for accepting a position on the faculty of Spelman College, the women's

college of Atlanta University" (xxiii). James Weldon Johnson's father was a waiter, his mother a schoolteacher. James Baldwin's Harlem family was poor; his step-father was a preacher. Starling, Johnson, Baldwin and others read Stowe's book well before becoming professionals, sometimes as far back as childhood. The tension between "high" and "low" and past and present, which informs the retrospective accounts I discuss, helps to clarify changes in the meaning of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for black readers over time.

Readers' comments always trail behind the reading experience; they are produced when reading stops.¹² A gap between the time of reading and the time of reporting on it is inevitable in all written responses. When adults depict childhood reading, the gap is substantial and may well be a source of distortion. Yet by taking the contexts of reading and of writing into account, we can learn a great deal from such comments--especially when diverse responses confirm one another, as they do in the case of the African American reader/writers in this essay.

Personal Motivations: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Explains the Past

There is good reason to suggest that many African Americans between the 1890s and the 1950s read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with "feverish intensity," like the narrator of James Weldon Johnson's 1912 fictionalized *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (28). But in trying to understand

what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* meant to black readers in the wake of slavery and the Civil War, we need to distinguish between two distinct grounds of Stowe's appeal. For some the book was a model to emulate, out of the desire to have an impact on social conditions. Black readers of this sort include Charles Chesnutt, who found both professional inspiration and social relevance in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. "Why could not a colored man . . . write a far better book about the South than Judge Tourgee or Mrs. Stowe has written?" Chesnutt asks, in a much cited passage of his journal (125). Ida B. Wells praised Stowe's sense of mission in 1885 and accepted the idea, so popular among white commentators of the period, that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was "one of the causes of the abolition of slavery ("Woman's" 181). Mary Church Terrell determined to write a novel that, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, would influence contemporary conditions.¹³ But Stowe's novel often had a more personal meaning for African Americans. It provided a range of characters, events, and images that readers could use to imagine black experience of the past and to clarify their own racialized position in the segregated United States. Some African Americans read Stowe's fiction for "reality" with a vengeance, absorbing it for knowledge of historical facts and attitudes that continued to affect the reader personally but that were not much discussed in public – or even in private.

Both Wells and Terrell were the children of ex-slaves who would not talk about the slave experience. Terrell's mother "never referred to that fact" (10). Wells's father rarely did either. "The only thing [Wells] remember[ed] about [her] father's reference to slave days" was one exceptional occasion when the subject triggered a sharp exchange between her father and grandmother. Hearing her father speak bitterly about whipping, starvation, and forgiveness, the young Wells "was burning to ask what he meant, but children were seen and not heard in those days. They didn't dare break into old folks' conversation" (10). As adults both Wells and Terrell affirmed the value of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Much earlier, however, an experience of engaged, often painful and always deeply personal, reading, informed their understanding of Stowe's novel.

If Terrell's mother, like Wells' father, avoided talking about slavery in front of the children, this reticence was only one of many factors that prevented the young Terrell and Wells from learning about slavery as they grew up. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, black reluctance to dwell on the past privately joined white reluctance to do so publicly, creating a powerful wall of silence. By the time Wells got her first teaching job, she had read Alcott and Oliver Optic as well as Shakespeare and the Bible, but she "had never read a Negro book or anything about Negroes" (Wells 21-22). The importance of this lack,

shared by readers from Wells and Terrell to Malcolm X, cannot be overestimated.¹⁴ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sometimes helped black readers break a pattern of avoidance which was exacerbated by the fact that former slaves, like most whites in the dominant culture, were eager to separate themselves from the past. As Nina Silber has shown, "forgetfulness, not memory, [was] . . . the dominant theme in the reunion culture" (4).

Terrell's beloved grandmother on her mother's side "could tell the most thrilling stories imaginable," Terrell writes in her autobiography, "and I listened to her by the hour. I wish I had inherited her gift" (*Colored Woman* 10). Sometimes Terrell's grandmother (unlike her parents) told stories about slave experience, "tales of brutality perpetrated upon slaves who belonged to cruel masters" (11). As a child, Terrell tried hard not to cry during such tellings because she knew that if she did her grandmother would stop talking. Nonetheless, the stories often "affected her and me so deeply she was rarely able to finish what she began. I tried to keep the tears back and the sobs suppressed, so that grandmother would carry the story to the bitter end, but I seldom succeeded. Then she would stop abruptly and refuse to go on, promising to finish it another time" (11). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was no direct substitute for the repeatedly deferred story that Terrell's grandmother failed to complete. However, Stowe's novel makes many appearances in Terrell's work. Terrell was a particularly enthusiastic black reader of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, claiming that

"no author has ever done more with the pen for the cause of human liberty than [Stowe] did" (*Colored Woman* 282). At the same time, Terrell's autobiography, written over fifty years after her childhood, repeatedly circles around the obliquely glimpsed, yet inaccessible story of slavery.

One of Terrell's chapters dwells on Stowe at length. As the centenary of Stowe's birth approached in 1911, Terrell "wrote a short *Appreciation of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, so that it might be available to as many as possible. It pained and shocked me to see how few, comparatively speaking, especially among young people, knew anything about the great service which has been rendered by Mrs. Stowe" (*Colored Woman* 280). This *Appreciation*, a small pamphlet of 23 pages, draws on familiar sources of information about Stowe's life and her composition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (e.g., Stowe's introduction of 1879, Charles Stowe's biography of his mother [1889], Annie Fields' *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* [1897], etc.) These and other discussions of Stowe's life and work circulated widely through the United States at the turn of the century in books, newspaper articles, magazines, and prefatory material for new editions of the novel. Terrell's discussion includes several well-known vignettes: how the scene of Uncle Tom's death initially came to Stowe in a vision as she sat in church, how Stowe read the scene aloud to her children, how Lincoln allegedly greeted her at the White House and

so on. However, in sharp contrast to other contemporary accounts, Terrell's *Appreciation* insists that slavery left behind a legacy of painful, unresolved issues. Unlike most commentators of this period, Terrell not only stresses the novel's historical significance, but also foregrounds the painful details of slavery.

By recalling the representation of "inhuman cruelty and legalized crime" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Terrell challenges the dominant early-twentieth century interpretive convention by which editors, illustrators, and commentators celebrated Stowe's achievement while diverting attention from the outrages of the "peculiar institution (*Harriet Beecher Stowe* 3).¹⁵ Defying this unwritten norm, Terrell begins by detailing the genesis of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Stowe's "horror. . . when she thought . . . [that] thousands of helpless men and women were even then being lashed and tortured and murdered under the very eyes of the church" (3). Terrell's pamphlet graphically suggests how intensely she herself read Stowe's novel. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seems to have come as something of a revelation, approximating the story her grandmother could not or would not provide. "Who has not wept as he has stood at the deathbed of old Uncle Tom," Terrell writes:

How we have looked with horror upon the lifeless form of poor old Prue, who had been whipped to death, and . . . put down in the cellar, where the flies had got her. But, stand

with Mrs. Stowe at the auction block, witness the agony of the mother torn from her child, see the despair of the wife, as she casts the last, long, lingering look upon the husband she will see no more on earth, hear the cries that are wrung from broken hearts crushed by the master hand without one pang of remorse, if you would feel this woman's power and learn what slavery was (*Harriet Beecher Stowe* 12-13, my emphasis).

Terrell's rehearsal of details from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* continues at some length as she notes "how we blush with shame . . . when the beautiful, virtuous Emmeline is sold to the loathsome Legree, to be made a slave of the passions of this fiend in human form. With what a sigh of relief do we see the waters of the river close over the form of Lucy, whose husband had been sold and whose only child stolen, so that life was too bitter for her to bear..." (13). Precisely such examples were routinely subject to cultural repression in the 1890s and the teens of the twentieth century. Public commentary of the period regularly praised *Uncle Tom's Cabin* without reviewing the grounds of its attack on the slave system. "Changes Wrought by One Book" a headline of 1911 proclaims on the centenary of Stowe's birth, characteristically emphasizing Stowe's contribution to the nation's moral and social progress. No wonder that Terrell's pamphlet "did not sell enough. . . to pay for the expense of printing it." Terrell

speculates that this failure was due to her "inexperience . . . in 'salesmanship'" (*Colored Woman* 280). But the failure was also due to a deep cultural need - for amnesia and denial – shared (for different reasons) by black and white adults.

Slavery from a Distance: Insight by Analogy

The theme of witnessing appears often in Terrell's writing. She figures the reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* itself as a kind of witnessing: "Who has not wept . . . at the deathbed of old Uncle Tom . . . How we have looked with horror upon the lifeless form of poor old Prue. . . . witness the agony of the mother torn from her child. . . ." (12-13). The act of witnessing is also central to an "important event" that, in Terrell's account, "changed the whole course of Harriet Beecher's life" as a young woman in Cincinnati (*Harriet Beecher Stowe* 5). Terrell explains that when Stowe crossed "the river into Kentucky to make a visit on an estate . . . she caught the first glimpse of slavery, and became acquainted with the hardships of the slave" (5). Direct glimpses of slavery were denied to Terrell--as to all African Americans in the post-Civil War period. For first-generation free blacks, such as Terrell and Wells, or the children of free blacks who had not been slaves, such as Chesnut or Johnson, the sense of slavery as so far and yet so near seems to have been especially harrowing. Perhaps partly for this reason Terrell accepts a familiar

account of Stowe's motivation that has been much criticized by scholars who object to sentiment for demeaning and coercing its objects.

Terrell's "Appreciation" of Stowe cites a well-known story about the genesis of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which suggests that at the "dying bed and ... grave" of Stowe's baby she "learned what a poor slave mother may feel, when her child is torn away from her" (*Harriet Beecher Stowe* 7).¹⁶ Like Stowe's description of reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to her young sons (they cried and condemned slavery),¹⁷ her claim that her novel originated in her own experience of losing a child exemplifies the way benevolent reformers believed empathy could work, enabling one person to grasp the pain of another, even someone in a radically different cultural position. Since the Stowe revival of the 1970s and 1980s, scholars have criticized *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its attempt to depict the inaccessible experiences of American slaves. The novel is often charged with eliciting emotions that are self-indulgent, rather than politically effective. But Terrell accepts Stowe's model of insight by analogy and takes tears as a legitimate response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Like Stowe and many of her white readers, Terrell herself could learn about slavery only indirectly through the medium of stories, by extrapolation from her parents' behavior and silences, and by analogy. When Terrell was four years old, a cat caught her mother's canary bird.

A woman who worked for us decided to punish the animal, called some of her friends together for that purpose, and with their assistance beat it to death. I remember well how I fought and scratched and cried, trying to save the cat's life. When I found I could not do so I fled from the awful scene before it succumbed.

As I look back upon that shocking exhibition of cruelty to animals, I can easily understand why those ignorant women were guilty of it. They had all been slaves and had undoubtedly seen men, women, and children unmercifully beaten by overseers for offenses of various kinds, and they were simply practicing upon an animal which had done wrong from their point of view the cruelty which had been perpetrated upon human beings over and over again (*Colored Woman* 13-14).

Writing of this scene as an adult, Terrell interprets the women's brutal behavior as a form of displacement. At the same time, this scene is among many directly witnessed by Terrell that came to constitute her own understanding -- by analogy -- of "what slavery was" (*Harriet Beecher Stowe* 13).

For Terrell the story of slavery is the story her grandmother could not/would not tell, as well as the story she herself would have liked to

tell. Terrell not only wished she had "inherited her [grandmother's] gift" for telling stories in general (*Colored Woman*, 10); she also had something specific in mind: she wanted to write an updated version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "a novel showing the shackles by which colored people are bound today, though nominally free, as the original *Uncle Tom's Cabin* bared the cruelties perpetrated upon them, when they were legally enslaved." When she asked Ray Stannard Baker, one of the editors of the *American Magazine*, "if he thought that his or any other publication would accept a modern version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," the answer was no (*Colored Woman* 233). Terrell "discovered that there are few things more difficult than inducing an editor of the average magazine to publish an article on the Race Problem, unless it sets forth the point of view which is popularly and generally accepted" (*Colored Woman* 224). In the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century, the figure of Uncle Tom was often adapted to romanticized and nostalgic evocations of black loyalty and devotion, images that deflected rather than represented the realities of race relations in the U.S. (Hochman, "Sentiment"; Hochman, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was rarely invoked to expose ongoing injustice or black humiliation in this period.

Terrell was "bitter[ly] disappoint[ed] . . . that [she] did not succeed as a story writer." Unstinting in her praise of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she was convinced that "the Race Problem could be solved more swiftly and more

surely through the instrumentality of the short story or novel than in any other way" (*Colored Woman* 234). Stowe was the subject of one of Terrell's first public lectures, which "was truly a labor of love," she writes in her autobiography; "I poured out my soul when I delivered it" (*Colored Woman* 162). Terrell lectured about Stowe, wrote about her, appeared as the figure of Stowe in a historical pageant organized by W.E.B. DuBois in 1913 (Gillman 396-97), and, drawing on her keen sense that black children lacked information about the past, planned to write a "Child's Life of Mrs. Stowe" (*Colored Woman* 280). Like Charles Chesnutt at age nine in 1875, noting in his journal that he has read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (but not for the first time), Terrell often returned to Stowe's book.¹⁸

Personal Motivations: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Explains the Present

In his fictive *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which was published a year after Terrell's *Appreciation of Stowe*, James Weldon Johnson includes an episode that centers on his reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Johnson's narrator/protagonist is drawn to, shattered, and "enlightened" by the book. Though *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* is a novel, not a "real" autobiography, it deserves a place in my analysis for several reasons. The story of the "Ex-Colored Man" was first published anonymously, and while the identity of the author "gradually leaked out and spread," as Johnson explains in his own autobiography, his

novel was authoritatively revealed to be fiction only when reissued in 1927 with Johnson as its avowed author. Both of Johnson's ploys--anonymity and fictionality--served an important function: they prevented the narrative from being read as a record of his own life. Consequently, this double generic protection allowed Johnson to address highly controversial results of racialization--such as the desire to "pass"--without suggesting that his protagonist's despair, or solution, was his own.¹⁹ The generic norms of fiction also enabled Johnson to stage an elaborate scene of reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* within the story of a boy's coming-of-age, without presenting this incident as his personal experience.

The childhood and youth of Johnson's "ex-colored man" is shaped by the absence of a usable past. The son of a black Southern "sewing girl," seduced by her employer's son, Johnson's narrator grows up with no awareness of being different from white people--he learns that he is not "white" only when the principal visits his class and asks the white pupils to stand. When the boy gets up, the teacher quietly asks him to "sit down for the present" (*Autobiography* 11). The boy leaves school that day "in a kind of stupor" (11). Returning home he buries his face in his mother's lap, then looks up and blurts out, "Mother, mother, tell me, am I a nigger?" With tears in her eyes "she hid her face in my hair and said with difficulty: 'No, my darling. . . You are as good as anybody; if anyone calls you a nigger don't notice them.' But the more she talked the less was I

reassured" (12). Only later--by reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*--does the boy begin to understand his own and his mother's "position, and what was our exact relation to the world in general" (28). Neither history books nor newspapers give him "real information" or explain his own experience to him: "But one day I drew from the circulating library a book that cleared the whole mystery, a book that I read with the same feverish intensity with which I had read the old Bible stories, a book that gave me my first perspective of the life I was entering; that book was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (28).

Johnson's own early history was quite different from that of his narrator. Born in 1871, the son of two legally free, married African Americans, Johnson grew up in Florida. As an adult he was a racial activist and general secretary of the NAACP. While writing his novel, he was serving as U. S. counsel to Venezuela. But in his autobiography, *Along This Way*, Johnson writes that "neither my father nor mother had taught me directly anything about race." Like other parents who felt one could not be far-enough removed from slave origins, Johnson's father did not discuss the past. "I never heard him speak of his childhood and what lay back of and beyond it," Johnson writes. Like his fictional protagonist, Johnson himself took time to grasp the implications of being "black." It was "some years" beyond childhood before he understood "the brutal impact of race" and "how race prejudice permeated the whole American

organism" (*Along* 31, 5, 32). Johnson's representation of a young man's reading in *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* does not match his own experience with regard to biographical detail. Yet both the emotional tone and political implications of the fictional episode accord with and clarify the experience of reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for other (real) black Americans of the period. An editorial that Johnson published in the *New York Age* in 1915 suggests that he read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in much the same spirit as the character in his novel.²⁰ Johnson's autobiography equates *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with *The Souls of Black Folk* for its "effect upon and within the Negro race" (*Along* 238).

In *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* the adult narrator is well aware of the "unfavorable criticism" often leveled at Stowe, and he speculates as to whether or not Stowe's book can be taken as "truthful" (29). But this question is not significant for him. "However that may be," he says, the book "opened my eyes as to who and what I was and what my country considered me" (29).²¹ *Uncle Tom's Cabin* enables the boy to gain perspective on the formative realities of his situation: "One of the greatest benefits I derived from reading the book was that I could afterwards talk frankly with my mother on all the questions which had been vaguely troubling my mind. As a result, she was entirely freed from reserve" (29). She begins to explain "things directly touching her life and mine and . . . things which had come down to her through the 'old folks.'

What she told me interested and even fascinated me. . ." (29-30). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provides a language, concepts, images of the past and the present – "it gave me my bearing" (29). The boy's reading of Stowe's novel is a turning point in his life. His relation to race shifts again and again in the course of his narrative, but the insight he gains from reading Stowe remains a foundational moment and ultimately leads him to abandon his "race" altogether, passing into whiteness, and anonymity.

African American children were drawn to Stowe's novel by questions and doubts that were not urgent for white ones. White children often read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* eagerly, after the war as in the antebellum years. But in both periods the grounds of their interest in the book were different from that of black children. In *A Mid-Century Child and Her Books* (1926) the white pioneer children's librarian Caroline Hewins singles out the look of Chloe's freshly baked cake, and the feel of Cassy's garret hiding place among her most important childhood memories of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Hewins repeatedly includes Stowe's novel on her influential lists of recommended children's books; but she cautions that while the book is "always interesting to children, . . . [it] is sometimes too exciting for those of sensitive nerves" (*Mid-Century* 78-79).²² Although Hewins worried about the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on "sensitive" (white) children, she probably did not imagine the impact of Stowe's novel on such a child as Johnson's young narrator, or on Mary Terrell,

who at the age of five was bewildered when a train conductor tried to send her to a "dirty" railway car even though, as she later explained to her mother, "my hands were clean and so was my face" and she was behaving "like a little lady." Later, although she "plied [her] father with questions," she could get "no satisfaction" from him: "he refused to talk about the affair and forbade me to do so" (*Colored Woman* 16).

A brief autobiographical narrative written in the late 1920s or early 1930s by a young African American woman, probably born in the first decade of the century, forcefully exemplifies the function of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for black readers during the era of widespread legal segregation in the United States. Everett Stonequist's *The Marginal Man* (1937) includes the "life history document" of a "negro girl" in a chapter-section on U.S. "Racial Minorities" (173, 171). According to this narrative, the girl was born in New York and raised in a Catholic orphanage by "loving sisters" among "fifty kids [of] all races except the Jew"(171-72, sic). Like Johnson's "ex-colored man" the girl had no racial consciousness as a child. "The word negro was never used by the father nor the sisters," she explains.

We were all children in their care. . . .Two years later a Southern white child was placed in our home by her divorced parents. This girl would call all the dark-skinned children 'niggers.' She was placed on bread and water several

times for this act. She soon was broken of it. I never had any feelings when she said negro. Negro to me was only a word used by angry children. (172)

However, when the girl finished grammar school she was sent to a Southern College for Negroes: "This is where my sorrows began" (172). At the college she was subjected to "speakers [who] would come and tell how different negroes were from whites" (172). In response, the girl begins to read "all the books I could get on negro life"--among them *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (173). "The more I read the more I brooded over just what was fit for the negro to do," she notes. With the help of her reading she forms clear and radical opinions about her obligations to herself and her race: "the negro must rise up and fight for his own. Pleading, begging and arguing will not solve the problem, only war can and must" (173). The girl's comments conclude with an expression of anger at the status quo and at the hypocritical ideology of the period. "If America is such a melting pot," she writes, "why can't she consider the negro as one of her finest products. The negro is not a by-product but a true product produced and raised on American soil" (173).

The girl's comments provide no details about her responses either to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or to any other books, but Stowe's novel is among eight works she "brood[s] over." These works span a considerable gamut of approaches to race. They include *Hazel*, one of the earliest chapter

books written for African American children and much advertised in W.E.B. DuBois' paper, *The Crisis*; *Fire and Flint* (1924) and *Flight* (1926), two tales of passing and racial violence by African American writer and activist, Walter White; and the *Leopard's Spots* (1902), Thomas Dixon's white-supremacist response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.²³

Placed in this company, Stowe's novel becomes part of the girl's personal experience and self-fashioning. It is one of the books that helps answer her question: "just what was fit for the negro to do"²⁴ This is exactly the question early black readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*--such as Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany--asked themselves and argued about.²⁵

African Americans rarely report crying over Stowe's tale, but the book elicited intense responses in some black readers that surely rivaled white antebellum reactions. In his well-known 1949 essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," Baldwin attacks Stowe as a writer of sentiment, melodrama and polemics. According to Henry Louis Gates, the terms of this critique suggest that, in his account of Stowe, Baldwin is really "talking about himself as a novelist speaking to his own deepest fears that as a novelist he was guilty of the same thing he disdained in Stowe" (xxix). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been a source of deep ambivalence for black readers; African American writers of the twentieth century often indicted the book and tried to free themselves from its influence. As Hortense Spillers puts this, "Stowe, the writer, casts a long shadow, becomes an implacable act

of precursor poetics that the latter-day black writer would both outdistance and 'forget'" (30).²⁶ However, before black authors can engage Stowe in dialogue by their writing, they have already done so in their reading. As Octavia Butler often notes, you cannot be a writer without being a reader first (Crosely 272).

Well before influentially pronouncing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a "very bad novel," Baldwin read the book "over and over" as a child, immersed in it deeply enough to shut out the noise of young siblings for whom he was babysitting and who, as a result "probably suffered" ("Everybody's" 495; *Notes* 11). Baldwin first mentions his childhood reading of Stowe in the Preface to *Notes of A Native Son* (1955), six years after publication of the much-reprinted "Everybody's Protest Novel." Twenty years later, in *The Devil Finds Work*, Baldwin elaborates his account of childhood reading. Baldwin was not the child of ex-slaves (though his step-father's mother had been one), nor was he long deprived of information about his racial past, as were Ida B. Wells, James Weldon Johnson, or Stonequist's "negro girl." But the young Baldwin found himself repeatedly impelled to re-read Stowe's tale. As his mother recalls in an interview, her son

lived in books. He'd sit at a table with a child in one arm and a book in the other. The first book he ever read through was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I think it came to us from a friend.

Jimmy was about eight. There was something about that

book. I couldn't understand it. He just read it over and over and over again. I even hid it away up in a closet. But he rambled around and found it again. And, after that, I stopped hiding it (qtd. in Eckman 41).²⁷

In the late 1940s and fifties Baldwin's critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had a powerful, negative impact on Stowe's standing in literary culture. But in his own words, Baldwin "lived with the people of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* " for a long time before attacking the book (*Devil* 14; see also Berlant 58-60).

In *The Devil Finds Work* Baldwin speaks about having "lived with the people of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* " (my emphasis), not about living with its "characters." This sentence appears in a discussion of movies that Baldwin saw as a child; but in discussing movies, he refers to the characters as "actors."²⁸ His point is, precisely, that when he was a child the characters of certain books were real to him, far more real than those of the big screen. "Intrigued, but not misled, by . . . Tom's forbearance before Simon Legree," Baldwin writes, "I . . . believed in their situation, which I suspected, dreadfully, to have something to do with my own" (11). He says he had "no idea . . . what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was really about, which was why I . . . [read it] so obsessively." But like Johnson's "ex-colored man" or Stonequist's "negro girl," Baldwin knew the book "had something to tell me. [Reading it] was this particular child's way of

circling around the question of what it meant to be a nigger" (10-11). Baldwin reemphasizes, "I had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* compulsivelyI was trying to find out something, sensing something in the book of some immense import for me: which, however, I knew I did not really understand" (14). Tom "was not a hero for me," Baldwin writes, because "he would not take vengeance into his own hands" (18). Yet even as a child, Baldwin understood that Tom was not the abjectly complicit slave he became in popular memory ("Tom allowed himself to be murdered for refusing to disclose the road taken by a runaway slave" [18]). Baldwin's experience of reading Stowe's novel was complex. He did not praise the novel, but like Mary Terrell he repeatedly wrote about it. His 1949 critique gave a long-lasting impetus to the case against sentiment, but he was intensely aware that a book which could captivate him so powerfully in childhood would not be laid to rest with one essay.

Reading Readers

In the 1880s and 1890s a new consensus emerged among white Northerners about what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* meant and how it should be read. Late nineteenth-century commentators assumed that contemporary readers would not become unduly agitated by Stowe's text.²⁹ They did not expect or propose that white men and women sit up all night weeping over the book, as many antebellum readers had reported doing. Indeed,

while writers of Stowe's generation often looked back nostalgically at the fervor with which readers of the 1850s had consumed *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, other commentators in the last decades of the century flatly asserted that "the great emancipation question of a few decades ago" did not sustain "all the old interest" for men and women of the 1890s (Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [1897] xvii). But if white readers in that era and after did not devour the book with "the intensity of other days," at least they could enjoy it "without an expenditure of torture and tears" (Knight 24-25, 100; McCray 100, 118). In the last two decades of the century, Stowe's novel was understood to be an historical artifact, part document, part children's book, which offered both a romantic and a realistic picture of the national past (Hochman, "Sentiment" 257-259). Later, as Pinckney suggests, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became "a book that . . . few read without good reason (vii). However, an increasingly literate portion of the reading public had plenty of "good reason" to read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Many African Americans did so out of personal and political motives.

As segregation became an increasingly entrenched ideology and policy, disempowered readers, especially young African Americans, most nearly fit the profile of Stowe's initial "intended readers"--readers with moral consciousness, gripped by social and racial concerns. During these years, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* spoke with peculiar force to literate black

Americans, keenly aware of their racialized place in society and seeking, often in vain, for information about the slave past of their own parents and grandparents. It seems reasonable to speculate that, as the century wore on, diverse African Americans (many of whom never wrote about Stowe) "devoured" *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with "feverish intensity," like Johnson's "ex-colored man" -- or "over and over and over again," like the young James Baldwin at the kitchen table.

Notes

Research for this essay was supported by a grant from the Israel Science Foundation. I thank Yael Ben-zvi, Shlomi Deloia, Ellen Gruber Garvey, and Susan K. Harris for their input on earlier drafts.

¹ See for example Wiegand and Danky; Holloway; Kelley; McHenry; Sichernan; Stewart; and Zboray and Zboray.

² On the neglect of slave narratives after the Civil War (and for much of the twentieth century) see also Andrews.

³ In an "Author's Prologue" for a second edition of *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*, Marion Wilson Starling writes, "Ten thousand pages of interviews [from the Federal Writer's Project] were stored in barrels in the basement of the Library of Congress, under the control of the chief librarian. The papers were off limits to scholars until 1944, when they were released by Dr. Benjamin Botkin, the librarian whose book on the narratives – *Lay My Burden Down* – was published in 1945 by University of Chicago Press" (xiv).

⁴ On the role of "faith in reading" in American culture, see Nord and Augst

⁵ In an address to the (black) Boston Literary and Historical Association in 1902 the Reverend Frank F. Hall cautioned his audience to avoid indiscriminate reading: "Don't try to enter into the companionship of too

many books . . . but know something about the really great literature of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare" (qtd. in McHenry 172). On the ongoing resistance to fiction, see Garrison, Radway, and Rubin.

⁶ Richard Wright, whose maternal grandmother condemned fiction as sinful, discovered social commentary as well as writing he could emulate in the work of Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser: "All my life had shaped me for the realism, the naturalism of the modern novel," he writes in *Black Boy*, "and I could not read enough of [these novels]" (250). In the 1940s the novel was still, relatively speaking, a generic upstart in literary culture. Insofar as novels were taught in universities, Lewis or Dreiser ranked well below the "great" fiction of Tolstoy, Dickens, Flaubert--or even American "greats" such as Hawthorne, Melville or Cooper. F. O. Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance* and Lionel Trilling's "Reality in America" in *The Liberal Imagination* reflect academic taste of the period.

⁷ An advertisement for "The Best Books" that includes Stowe's biography also appears in *The Crisis* September, 1912: 259; November, 1912: 52; and January 1913: 155. In 1931 a "Philadelphia correspondent" wrote to Walter White, secretary of the NAACP, describing himself as "a Negro father" and asking for books "about the Negro or written by Negroes." In response, W.E.B. Dubois, editor of *The Crisis*, includes Stowe's novel on a list of recommended titles (Holloway 33). For the full list, see Holloway 36-7.

⁸ Bolivar was particularly interested in preserving information about Philadelphia's "African American past in the face of exclusion from the city's efforts to document [the city's] past"(Welburn 174). His collection included the first edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the Tauchnitz edition of *Dred*, as well as several other works by Stowe. I thank William Welburn for this information. Other African American efforts to preserve material evidence of black history in this period include the work of Arthur Schomburg, historian, bibliophile, and co-founder of the Negro Society for Historical Research in New York (1911) as well as William Dorsey's scrapbook collection (preserved in the William H. Dorsey collection at Cheney State College in Philadelphia). Dorsey devoted almost an entire scrapbook to newspaper clippings about Stowe.

⁹ Morrison made this point in an NEH Summer Seminar on "Fiction and History" directed by Emory Elliott at Princeton in 1989.

¹⁰ On "the emancipation moment" see Davis.

¹¹ While Arac's claim is not exact, it accurately reflects the cultural climate of the period. On editions of the 1940s see Parfait 224.

¹² As John Frow writes, in order to grasp what a book has meant to a reader of the past we must rely "on secondary manifestations most of which consist of one or another form of self-report and all of which are dependent upon translation of the micro-processes of reading into . . . a time-bound critical vocabulary." Yet the "time-bound vocabulary" itself can be an important object of analysis (15).

¹³ On Terrell's enthusiasm for Stowe, see Terrell, *A Colored Woman* 233; Terrell, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*; Sterling; and Sicherman. On broader African American responses to Stowe, see Spillers, Warren, and Yarborough.

¹⁴ Malcolm X abrogated his self-imposed ban on novels to read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in prison, while seeking books "about black history." "I never will forget how shocked I was when I began reading about slavery's total horror," he writes. "Books like the one by Frederick Olmstead opened my eyes to the horrors suffered when the slave was landed in the United States. . . . Of course I read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, In fact I believe that's the only novel I have ever read since I started serious reading (Haley and Malcolm X 176, 177).

¹⁵ On this dynamic see Hochman, "Sentiment."

¹⁶ Stowe makes this point in a letter to Eliza Cabot Follen. rpt. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Ammons 413.

¹⁷ This account is often cited. It appears in Stowe's Introduction to the 1879 edition of the novel, reprinted by Houghton Mifflin several times (xxxv). More recent discussions of Stowe also mention the vignette. See, for example, Roth 99. E. Bruce Kirkham (72-75) examines contradictions among several versions of the story

¹⁸ Chesnutt wrote specifically, "Yesterday I went up to Mr. Harris and Stayed nearly all day. Played the organ, and read 1 vol 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' It was no ways old to me, although I have read it before" (50).

¹⁹ Johnson notes with satisfaction that most reviewers accepted *Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man* as "a human document," although "there were some doubters," and adds that he "did get a certain pleasure out of anonymity that no acknowledged book could have given" (238).

²⁰ See "Uncle Tom's Cabin" 612-14. First published in the *New York Age*, this short piece attacks the "incalculable harm" likely to ensue from the newly released movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. Johnson begins by criticizing a recent protest against a theatrical version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was to be performed in Atlanta, Georgia. The play finally was allowed to appear, Johnson remarks bitterly, when it "was changed and given the Arcadian title of 'Old Plantation Days'[,] the offensive parts were expurgated, Simon Legree was transfigured into a sort of benevolent patriarch, Uncle Tom was made into a happy old darkey who greatly enjoyed being a slave and who ultimately died of too much good treatment, and so, a performance was given that was, no doubt, a great success, and offended nobody's sensibilities" (613). Johnson's ironic description of these editorial changes clearly reflects his understanding of Stowe's novel as strong medicine, not only in its own time, but also in 1915.

²¹ The idea that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* teaches Johnson's narrator "what I was and what my country considered me" seems to confirm Walter Benn Michaels' claim that certain African American texts (*Beloved* is his central example) promote an idea of history that, experienced as a kind of group "memory," becomes a ground of identity construction. Yet Johnson's narrator, like Terrell, and other African Americans in the post-Civil War Period, are drawn to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by the very belief that, according to Michaels, Morrison's fiction (like Stephen Greenblatt's historicism) rejects: the belief "that we might learn from the past things that are useful in the present. . . [by] taking the past as an object of knowledge" (6). Johnson's narrator, Terrell, and others collect information in order to understand the puzzling behavior of close relatives (unexplained words, silence and shame) as well as the attitudes of white teachers and railway porters—in other words they seek, by knowing the past, to explain the present.

²² I am grateful to Courtney Weikle-Mills for alerting me to this passage. Hewins recommends *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Books for Boys and Girls* 10. An earlier version, *Books for the Young* (1882) recommended *Uncle Tom's Cabin* without the caution.

²³ *The Leopard's Spots* and Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905) were the inspiration for *Birth of a Nation*. The other books on the "negro girl's" reading list are W. E. B. DuBois's *Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), Jessie Fauset's *There is Confusion* (1924), and Gertrude Sanborn's *Veiled Aristocrats* (1923).

²⁴ In discussing the eclectic booklist of J. Saunders Redding, African American teacher and scholar of American studies, Holloway emphasizes Redding's unexpected mention of "racially invidious" texts, such as Charles Carroll's *The Negro, Man or Beast* and Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots*. Although Redding's autobiography typically mentions a range of books that affected his childhood, his notation of books he has "hated" as well as "loved" makes his booklist exceptional in Holloway's account (177, 176). Yet Redding's list, like the list of eight titles compiled by Stonequists "negro girl," is heavily weighted toward books that highlight racial conflict. Such books play a special role on a black booklist; they impel black readers to "brood" over their own life situation, asking "what was fit for the Negro to do," and even imagining race-war.

²⁵ On the conflict between Douglass and Delany regarding the implications of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its popularity and implications at mid-century see Levine, ch. 2.

²⁶ White literary commentators have reinforced the idea of Stowe as a touchstone to "negro" writing. "Mrs. Stowe has invented the negro novel," George Eliot famously wrote ("Review").

²⁷ Eckman's biography of Baldwin is based largely on interviews. In a page of "Acknowledgements" she thanks those "who, by sharing with me their memories and experiences, helped me trace Mr. Baldwin's passage from Harlem to the present."

²⁸ Throughout *The Devil Finds Work* Baldwin explores the question of aesthetic illusion and the way movies or books create the illusion of reality--or do not. See, e. g., 13-14, 25-26, 30.

²⁹ As one introduction to the novel in this period puts this, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "can be read today with as deep enjoyment of its thrilling story and as absorbing interest in its exciting subject, as in the days when all the world went wild over the sorrows of Uncle Tom and wept at the death of the saint-like Eva" (Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Art and Memorial Edition* 10).

Works Cited

Advertisement. "Are You Interested in the Negro Problem or Part of It."

The Crisis Jan.1912: 125, Feb 1912: 169, Mar.1912: 217.

Advertisement. "The Best Books." *The Crisis* Sept.1912: 259, Dec.1912:

52, Jan. 1913: 155.

Andrews, William L. *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of African*

American Autobiography 1760-1865. Chicago: U of Illinois P,

1988.

Arac, Jonathan. "Uncle Tom's Cabin vs. Huckleberry Finn." *Huckleberry*

Finn as Idol and Target. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1997: 90-107

Augst, Thomas. "Faith in Reading: Public Libraries, Liberalism, and the

Civil Religion." *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of*

Libraries in the United States. Ed. Thomas Augst and Kenneth

Carpenter. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2007. 147-83.

Baldwin, James. *The Devil Finds Work*. New York: Dial, 1976.

---. "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949). Uncle Tom's Cabin. Ed.

Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 1994: 495-500.

---. *Notes of A Native Son*. London: Michael Joseph, 1949.

-
- Berlant, Lauren. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008.
- "Changes Wrought by One Book." June 8, 1911. *Stowe Scrapbook. Beecher-Stowe Collection 1798-1956*. Schlesinger Library Radcliff Institute for Advanced Study. Reel no. 5. Folder 379.
- Chesnutt, Charles. *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*. Ed. Richard H. Brodhead. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.
- Coulter, Charles Edward. *"Take up the Black Man's Burden": Kansas City's African American Communities 1865-1939*. St. Louis: U of Missouri P, 2006.
- Crosely, Robert. "Reader's Guide." *Kindred*. By Octavia E. Butler. Boston: Beacon, 2003.
- Davis, David Brion. *The Emancipation Moment*. Gettysburg, PA: Gettysburg College, 1983.
- Eckman, Fern Marja. *The Furious Passage of James Baldwin*. New York: M. Evans, 1966.
- Eliot, George. Rev. of *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. Boston: Hall, 1980.

-
- Frow, John. "Afterlife: Texts as Usage." *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 1 (2008): 1-23. 10 May 2009
<<http://www.english.udel.edu/rsss/site/Frow.pdf>>.
- Garrison, Dee. *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society 1876-1920*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., Introduction. *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin*. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Hollis Robbins. New York: Norton, 2007. xi-xlvii.
- Gillman, Susan. "Pageantry, Maternity, and World History." *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W. E. B. DuBois*. Ed. Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007. 378-416.
- Golden, Marita. *Migrations of the Heart: A Personal Odyssey*. New York: Doubleday, 1983.
- Haley, Alex and Malcolm X. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Grove, 1965.
- Hewins, Caroline, M. *A Mid-Century Child and Her Books*. New York: Macmillan, 1926.
- . *Books for Boys and Girls*. 3rd rev. ed. Chicago: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1915.

---. Books for the Young: A Guide for Parents and Children. New York:

F. Leypoldt, 1882.

Hochman, Barbara. "Sentiment Without Tears: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as
History in the 1890s." *New Directions in American Reception Study*.

Ed. Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor. New York: Oxford UP,

2008: 255-76.

---. *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Reading Revolution: Race, Literacy,
Childhood and*

Fiction 1851-1911. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2011.

---. "Uncle Tom's Cabin at the World's Columbian Exhibition" *Libraries
and Culture* 41.1 (2006): 82-108.

Holloway, Karla F. C. *Bookmarks: Reading in Black and White*. New
Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2006.

Johnson, James Weldon. *Along this Way*. 1933. New York: Da Capo,
2000.

---. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. 1912. New York:
Penguin, 1990.

---. "Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Clansman." 1915. *Writings*. New York:
Library of America, 2004. 612-14.

-
- Kelley, Mary. *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2006.
- Kirkham, E. Bruce. *The Building of Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1977.
- Knight, Kate Brannon. *History of the Work of the Connecticut Women at the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893*. Hartford, CT: Hartford P, 1898.
- Levine, Robert Steven. *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997.
- Lowell, James Russell. "The Five Indispensable Authors (Homer, Dante, Cervantes, Goethe, Shakespeare)." *Century* Dec. 1893: 223-4.
- McCray, Florine Thayer. *The Life-Work of the Author of Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889.
- McHenry, Elizabeth. *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. 'You Who Never Was There': Slavery and the New Historicism, Deconstruction and the Holocaust." *Narrative*, 4.1 (1996): 1-16.

-
- Mitchell, W. J. T. *Picture Theory: Verbal and Visual Representation*.
Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.
- Nord, David Paul. *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth
of Mass Media in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004.
- Parfait, Claire. *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852-2002*.
Burlington, VT. : Ashgate, 2007.
- Pinckney, Darryl. Introduction. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. By Harriett Beecher
Stowe. New York: Signet, 1998.
- Radway, Janice. *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club,
Literary Taste, and Middle Class Desire*. Chapel Hill: U of North
Carolina P, 1997.
- Roth, Sarah N. "The Mind of a Child: Images of African Americans in
Early Juvenile Fiction." Journal of the Early Republic. 25.1 (2005):
79-109.
- Rubin, Joan Shelley. *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Chapel Hill: U
of North Carolina P, 1992.
- Sicherman, Barbara. *Well-Read Lives: How Books Inspired a Generation
of American Women*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2010.
- Silber, Nina. *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South 1865-
1900*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993.

-
- Spillers, Hortense. "Changing the Letter: The Yokes, the Jokes of Discourse, or Mrs. Stowe, Mr. Reed." *Slavery and the Literary Imagination: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1987*. Eds. Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989. 25-61.
- Starling, Marion Wilson. *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History* (1981) Washington D.C.: Howard UP, 1988.
- Sterling, Dorothy. *Black Foremothers: Three Lives*. 2d. ed. New York: Feminist, 1988.
- Stewart, David M. *Reading and Disorder in Antebellum America*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2011.
- Stonequist, Everett V. *Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1937.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. Introduction. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1896. xxxi-lxi
- . *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 1994.
- . *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Eaton and Mains, 1897.
- . *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Art and Memorial Edition*. Chicago: Thompson and Thomas, 1897.
- Terrell, Mary Church. *A Colored Woman in a White World*. Washington

DC: Ransdell, 1940.

---. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: An Appreciation*. Washington, DC: Murray, 1911.

Warren, Kenneth. "The afterlife of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." *The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Ed. Cindy Weinstein. New York: Cambridge UP, 2004: 219-234.

Washington, Booker T. *Up from Slavery*. 1901. New York: Dover, 1995.

Welburn, William C. "To 'Keep the Past in Lively Memory': William Carl Bolivar's Efforts to Preserve African American Cultural Heritage." *Libraries and the Cultural Record*. 42.2. (2007) 165-179.

Wells, Ida B. *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. Ed. Alfreda M. Duster. Chicago: Uof Chicago P, 1970.

---. "Woman's Mission." *New York Freeman* 26 Dec. 1885. Rpt. in *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells*. Ed. Miriam DeCosta-Willis. Boston: Beacon, 1995. 179-182.

Wiegand, Wayne, and James P. Danky, eds. *Print Culture in a Diverse America*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1998.

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.

Yarborough, Richard. "Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel." *New Essays on*

Uncle Tom's Cabin. Ed. Eric J. Sundquist. New York: Cambridge UP, 1987. 45-84.

Zboray, Ronald J., and Mary Saracino Zboray. *Everyday Ideas:*

Socioliterary Experience among Antebellum New Englanders.

Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.