

1852

Harriet Beecher Stowe's (1811–1896) novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: or, Life among the Lowly*, sold over 300,000 copies during its first year of publication. Its strongly antislavery themes, vivid characters, and sentimentalism helped many white readers in the North understand and feel deeply about the plight of slaves. In the following passage, southern slave owner Augustine St. Clare discusses the institution with his Northern abolitionist cousin, Ophelia.

Miss Ophelia stopped her knitting, and looked surprised; and St. Clare, apparently enjoying her astonishment, went on.

“You seem to wonder; but if you will get me fairly at it, I'll make a clean breast of it. This cursed business, accursed of God and man, what is it? Strip it of all its ornament, run it down to the root and nucleus of the whole, and what is it? Why, because my brother Quashy is ignorant and weak, and I am intelligent and strong—because I know how, and *can* do it—therefore, I may steal all he has, keep it, and give him only such and so much as suits my fancy. Whatever is too hard, too dirty, too disagreeable for me, I may set Quashy to doing. Because I don't like work, Quashy shall work. Because the sun burns me, Quashy shall stay in the sun. Quashy shall earn the money, and I will spend it. Quashy shall lie down in every puddle, that I may walk over dryshod. Quashy shall do my will, and not his, all the days of his mortal life, and have such a chance of getting to heaven at last as I find convenient. This I take to be about what slavery *is*. I defy anybody on earth to read our slave-code, as it stands in our law-books, and make anything else of it. Talk of the *abuses* of slavery! Humbug! The *thing itself* is the essence of all abuse! And the only reason why the land don't sink under it, like Sodom and Gomorrah, is because it is *used* in a way infinitely better than it is. For pity's sake, for shame's sake, because we are men born of women, and not savage beasts, many of us do not, and dare not—we would *scorn* to use the full power which our savage laws put into our hands. And he who goes the furthest, and does the worst, only uses within limits the power that the law gives him.”

St. Clare had started up, and, as his manner was when excited, was walking with hurried steps, up and down the floor. His fine face, classic as that of a Greek

statue, seemed actually to burn with the fervour of his feelings. His large blue eyes flashed, and he gestured with an unconscious eagerness. Miss Ophelia had never seen him in this mood before, and she sat perfectly silent.

"I declare to you," said he, suddenly stopping before his cousin—"it's no sort of use to talk or to feel on this subject—but I declare to you, there have been times when I have thought, if the whole country would sink, and hide all this injustice and misery from the light, I would willingly sink with it. When I have been traveling up and down on our boats, or about on my collecting tours, and reflected that every brutal, disgusting, mean, low-lived fellow I met, was allowed by our laws to become absolute despot of as many men, women, and children, as he could cheat, steal, or gamble money enough to buy—when I have seen such men in actual ownership of helpless children, of young girls and women—I have been ready to curse my country, to curse the human race!"

"Augustine! Augustine!" said Miss Ophelia, "I'm sure you've said enough. I never, in my life, heard anything like this; even at the North."

"At the North!" said St. Clare, with a sudden change of expression, and resuming something of his habitual careless tone. "Pooh! you northern folks are cold-blooded; you are cool in everything! You can't begin to curse up hill and down, as we can when we get fairly at it."

"Well, but the question is—" said Miss Ophelia.

"O, yes, to be sure, the *question is*—and a deuce of a question it is!—How came *you* in this state of sin and misery? Well, I shall answer in the good old words you used to teach me, Sundays. I came so by ordinary generation. My servants were my father's, and, what is more, my mother's; and now they are mine, they and their increase, which bids fair to be a pretty considerable item. My father, you know, came first from New England; and he was just such another man as your father—a regular old Roman; upright, energetic, noble-minded, with an iron will. Your father settled down in New England, to rule over rocks and stones, and to force an existence out of Nature; and mine settled in Louisiana, to rule over men and women, and force existence out of them. . . .

"Now, an aristocrat, you know, the world over, has no human sympathies, beyond a certain line in society. In England the line is in one place, in Burmah in another, and in America in another; but the aristocrat of all these countries never goes over it. What would be hardship and distress and injustice in his own class, is a cool matter of course in another one. My father's dividing line was that of colour. *Among his equals*, never was a man more just and generous; but he considered the negro, through all possible gradations of colour, as an intermediate link between man and animals, and graded all his ideas of justice or generosity on this hypothesis. I suppose, to be sure, if anybody had asked him, plump and fair, whether they had human immortal souls, he might have hemmed and hawed, and said 'Yes.' But my father was not a man much troubled with spiritualism; religious sentiment he had none, beyond a veneration for God, as decidedly the head of the upper classes." . . .

St. Clare rested his head on his hands, and did not speak for some minutes. After a while, he looked up, and went on:—

“What poor, mean trash this whole business of human virtue is! A mere matter, for the most part, of latitude and longitude, and geographical position, acting with natural temperament. The greater part is nothing but an accident. Your father, for example, settles in Vermont, in a town where all are, in fact, free and equal; becomes a regular church member and deacon, and in due time joins an Abolitionist society, and thinks us all little better than heathens. Yet he is, for all the world, in constitution and habit, a duplicate of my father. I can see it leaking out in fifty different ways—just that same strong, overbearing, dominant spirit. You know very well how impossible it is to persuade some of the folks in your village that Squire Sinclair does not feel above them. The fact is, though he has fallen on democratic times, and embraced a democratic theory, he is to the heart an aristocrat, as much as my father, who ruled over five or six hundred slaves.”

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Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: or, Life among the Lowly* (London: Ingram, Cooke, 1852), 175–180.

**DOCUMENT 11.3****MARY HENDERSON EASTMAN, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin***

1852

Mary Henderson Eastman (1818–1887), like many Southerners, was appalled by Harriet Beecher Stowe's powerful use of vivid images and sentimentality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Doc. 11.2). She published *Aunt Phillis's Cabin: or, Southern Life as It Is* as a reaction to Stowe's book. In the following passage, Southerner Arthur Weston discusses slavery with Abel Johnson, a fellow student at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

“Now,” said Abel, “having a couple of particularly good cigars, where did we leave off?”

“It's too warm for argument,” said Arthur, watching the curling of the gray smoke as it ascended.

“We need not argue,” said Abel; “I want to catechize you.”

“Begin.”

“Do you think that the African slave-trade can be defended?”

"No, assuredly not."

"Well," said Abel, "how can you defend your right to hold slaves as property in the United States?"

"Abel," said Arthur, "when a Yankee begins to question there is no reason to suppose he ever intends to stop. I shall answer your queries from the views of Governor Hammond, of Carolina. They are at least worthy of consideration. What right have you New England people to the farms you are now holding?"

"The right of owning them," said Abel.

"From whom did you get them?" asked Arthur.

"Our fathers."

"And how did they get them?"

"From the Red men, their original owners."

"Well," said Arthur, "we all know how these transactions were conducted all over the country. We wanted the lands of the Red men, and we took them. Sometimes they were purchased, sometimes they were wrested; always, the Red men were treated with injustice. They were driven off, slaughtered, and taken as slaves. Now, God as clearly gave these lands to the Red men as he gave life and freedom to the African. Both have been unjustly taken away."

"But," said Abel, "we hold property in land, you in the bodies and souls of men."

"Granted," said Arthur; "but we have as good a right to our *property* as you to yours—we each inherit it from our fathers. You must know that slaves were recognized as *property* under the constitution. John Q. Adams, speaking of the protection extended to the peculiar interests of the South, makes these remarks: 'Protected by the advantage of representation on this floor, protected by the stipulation in the constitution for the recovery of fugitive slaves, protected by the guarantee in the constitution to the owners of this *species of property*, against domestic violence! It was considered in England as any other kind of commerce; so that you cannot deny our right to consider them as property now, as well as then.'"

"But can you advocate the enslaving of your fellow man?" said Abel.

"No," said Arthur, "if you put the question in that manner; but if you come to the point, and ask me if I can conscientiously hold in bondage slaves in the South, I say yes, without the slightest hesitation. I'll tell you why. You must agree with me, if the Bible allow slavery there is no sin in it. Now, the Bible does allow it. You must read those letters of Governor Hammond to Clarkson, the English Abolitionist. The tenth commandment, your mother taught you, no doubt: 'thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his *man-servant*, nor his *maid-servant*, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.' These are the words of God, and as such, should be obeyed strictly. In the most solemn manner, the man-servant and the maid-servant are considered the *property* of thy neighbor. Generally the word is rendered slave. This command includes all classes of servants; there is the Hebrew-brother, who shall go out in the seventh year, and the hired-servant, and those 'purchased from

the heathen round about,' who were to be bondmen forever. In Leviticus, speaking of the 'bondmen of the heathen which shall be round about,' God says, 'And ye shall take them for an inheritance, for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen forever.' I consider that God permitted slavery when he made laws for the master and the slave, therefore I am justified in holding slaves. In the times of our Saviour, when slavery existed in its worst form, it was regarded as one of the conditions of human society; it is evident Abolition was not shadowed forth by Christ or his apostles. 'Do unto all men as ye would have them do unto you,' is a general command, inducing charity and kindness among all classes of men; and does not authorize interference with the established customs of society. If, according to this precept of Christ, I am obliged to manumit [free] my slaves, you are equally forced to purchase them. If I were a slave, I would have my master free me; if you were a slave, and your owner would not give you freedom, you would have some rich man to buy you. From the early ages of the world, there existed the poor and the rich, the master and the slave.

"It would be far better for the Southern slaves, if our institution, as regards them, were left to 'gradual mitigation and decay, which time *may* bring about. The course of the Abolitionists, while it does nothing to destroy this institution, greatly adds to its hardships.' Tell me that 'man-stealing' is a sin, and I will agree with you, and will insist that the Abolitionists are guilty of it. In my opinion, those who consider slavery a sin, challenge the truth of the Bible.

"Besides, Abel," continued Arthur, "what right have you to interfere? Your Northern States abolished slavery when it was their interest to do so: let us do the same. In the meantime, consider the condition of these dirty vagabonds, these free blacks, who are begging from me every time I go into the street. I met one the other day, who had a most lamentable state of things to report. He had rheumatism, and a cough, and he spit blood, and he had no tobacco, and he was hungry, and he had the toothache. I gave him twenty-five cents as a sort of panacea, and advised him to travel South and get a good master. He took the money, but not the advice."

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Mary Henderson Eastman, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin: or, Southern Life as It Is* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, Grambo, 1852), 132-135.