



## *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, concluding remarks Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852)

*The anti-slavery novel Uncle Tom's Cabin is credited with being the second greatest bestseller of the 19th century, after the Bible. Within a decade of its publication, the novel had been translated into nearly 20 languages of Europe and western Asia, and the book quickly traveled along routes of colonization, then-past or then-present, to reach western Africa, Latin America, and Indonesia. The novel's white author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, personally toured Britain and continental Europe to raise international support for efforts to end slavery in the United States.*

*Stowe was a member of a New England family who became known collectively for their vocation-mindedness: her father and several of her siblings were clergy (Presbyterian or Congregational) or social reformers. Stowe wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin because she was outraged by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, but she did not belong to any anti-slavery organization when she wrote the novel and was not versed in debates among activists over goals and methods. She thus unwittingly rankled abolitionists for appearing to support the colonization movement, which aimed to relocate free blacks from the United States to Liberia—an aim that abolitionists denounced as racist. Stowe spoke favorably of Liberian colonization in the novel's afterword, as seen in the selections below; also, emigration to Liberia was the happy ending she gave to African American characters in Uncle Tom's Cabin who escaped from slavery. Later, Stowe declared herself opposed to coercing or pressuring free blacks to emigrate, but she continued to view the colonization of Africa by African Americans as a praiseworthy endeavor.*

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. Nothing of tragedy can be written, can be spoken, can be conceived, that equals the frightful reality of scenes daily and hourly acting on our shores, beneath the shadow of American law and the shadow of the cross of Christ.

And now, men and women of America, is this a thing to be trifled with, apologized for, and passed over in silence? [...]

Do you say that the people of the free states have nothing to do with it and can do nothing?

Would to God this were true! But it is not true. [...] If the mothers of the free states had 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; the sons of the free states would not have connived at the extension of slavery in our national body; the sons of the free states would not, as they do, trade the souls and bodies of men as an equivalent to money in their mercantile dealings. [...] Northern men, Northern mothers, Northern Christians have something more to do than denounce their brethren at the South; they have to look to the evil among themselves.

But what can any individual do? Of that, every individual can judge. There is one thing that every individual can do—they can see to it that *they feel right*. An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who *feels* strongly, healthily, and justly on the great interests of humanity is a constant benefactor to the human race. See, then, to your sympathies in this matter! Are they in harmony with the sympathies of Christ? Or are they swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy?

Christian men and women of the North! Still further, you have another power: you can *pray*! Do you believe in prayer? Or has it become an indistinct apostolic tradition? 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 [to] them, from above, the courage and grace of martyrdom.

But still more. On the shores of our free states are emerging the poor, shattered, broken remnants of families—men and women, escaped by miraculous providences from the surges of slavery—feeble in knowledge and, in many cases, infirm in moral constitution from a system which confounds and confuses every principle of Christianity and morality. They come to seek a refuge among you; they come to seek education, knowledge, Christianity.

What do you owe to these poor unfortunates, O Christians? Does not every American Christian owe to the African race some effort at reparation for the wrongs that the American nation has brought upon them? Shall the doors of churches and schoolhouses be shut upon them? Shall states arise and shake them out? Shall the church of Christ hear in silence the taunt that is thrown at them, and shrink away from the helpless hand that they stretch out, and, by her silence, encourage the cruelty that would chase them from our borders? If it must be so, it will be a mournful spectacle. If it must be so, the country will have reason to tremble when it remembers that the fate of nations is in the hands of One who is very pitiful and of tender compassion.

Do you say, “We don’t want them here; let them go to Africa”?

That the providence of God has provided a refuge in Africa is, indeed, a great and noticeable fact; but that is no reason why the church of Christ should throw off that responsibility to this outcast race which her profession demands of her.

To fill up Liberia with an ignorant, inexperienced, half-barbarized race, just escaped from the chains of slavery, would be only to prolong, for ages, the period of struggle and conflict which attends the inception of new enterprises. Let the church of the North receive these poor sufferers

in the spirit of Christ—receive them to the educating advantages of Christian republican society and schools—until they have attained to somewhat of a moral and intellectual maturity, and then assist them in their passage to those shores where they may put in practice the lessons they have learned in America. [...]

This is an age of the world when nations are trembling and convulsed. A mighty influence is abroad, surging and heaving the world as with an earthquake. And is America safe? Every nation that carries in its bosom great and unredressed injustice has in it the elements of this last convulsion.

For what is this mighty influence thus rousing, in all nations and languages, those groanings that cannot be uttered for man's freedom and equality? O church of Christ, read the signs of the times! Is not this power the spirit of HIM whose kingdom is yet to come and whose will [is] to be done on earth as it is in heaven?

But who may abide the day of his appearing? [...] Christians! Every time that you pray that the kingdom of Christ may come, can you forget that prophecy associates, in dread fellowship, the *day of vengeance* with the year of his redeemed?

A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God, and the *Christian church* has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved—but by repentance, justice, and mercy; for not surer is the eternal law by which the millstone sinks in the ocean than that stronger law by which injustice and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty God!

**Source:** Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; Or, Life among the Lowly*, vol. 2 (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., 1852), 314-322 (chap. 45), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hwpa9u>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

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