Introduction

R. J. Ellis

One of the most influential books ever written, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* was also one of the most popular in the nineteenth century. Stowe wrote her novel in order to advance the anti-slavery cause in the ante-bellum USA, and rooted her attempt to do this in a ‘moral suasionist’ approach — one designed to persuade her US American compatriots by appealing to their God-given sense of morality. This led to some criticism from immediate abolitionists — who wished to see slavery abolished immediately rather than rely upon [per]suasion.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was first published in 1852 as a serial in the abolitionist newspaper *National Era*. It was then printed in two volumes in Boston by John P. Jewett and Company later in 1852 (with illustrations by Hammatt Billings). The first printing of five thousand copies was exhausted in a few days.

Title page, with illustration by Hammatt Billings, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Vol. 1, Boston, John P. Jewett and Co., 1852

During 1852 several reissues were printed from the plates of the first edition; each reprinting also appearing in two volumes, with the addition of the words ‘Tenth’ to ‘One Hundred and Twentieth Thousand’ on the title page, to distinguish between each successive re-issue. Later
reprintings of the two-volume original carried even higher numbers. These reprints appeared in various bindings — some editions being quite lavishly bound. One-volume versions also appeared that same year — most of these being pirated editions. From the start the book attracted enormous attention.

As early as September 1852 the London *Times* carried a review, which immediately identified Stowe’s tactics within her novel: ‘Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe is an abolitionist, and her book is a vehement and unrestrained argument in favor of her creed … With the instinct of her sex, the clever authoress takes the shortest road to her purpose, and strikes at the convictions of her readers by assailing their hearts’. It is possible, perhaps, to detect a note of anxiety in this review — suggesting a less than wholehearted endorsement of Stowe’s abolitionist message. Other reviews, however, were more openly enthusiastic:

**UNCLE TOM’S CABIN. BY MRS. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.**
In two volumes of 312 pages each.

For thrilling delineation of character, and power of description, this work is unrivalled. It has been denominated, and with truth, THE STORY OF THE AGE! The fact that ten thousand copies have been sold in two weeks is evidence sufficient of its unbounded popularity. Three paper mills are constantly at work, manufacturing the paper, and three power presses are working twenty-four hours per day, in printing it, and more than one hundred bookbinders are incessantly plying their trade, to bind them, and still it has been impossible as yet to supply the demand. Testimonials of the strongest kind, numerous enough to fill a volume, have already appeared in the public journals. We have room only for the following, from the *Congregationalist* of the 2d inst.:

“We conceive, then, that in writing ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe has done more to diffuse real knowledge of the facts and workings of American Slavery, and to arouse the sluggish nation to shake off the curse, and abate the wrong, than has been accomplished by all the orations, and anniversaries, and arguments, and documents, which the last ten years have been the witness of. Let nobody be afraid of it because it does not claim to be a memoir, or a table of statistics. It is the interlacing of a thousand memoirs, and the very quintessence of infinite statistics. It takes no extreme views. It does not seek to seize upon the most horrible atrocities, and brand the whole system as worse than it is. It is fair, and generous, and calm, and candid. A slaveholder might read it without anger, but not easily without a secret abhorrence of the system, which he himself upholds. It brings out, quietly and collaterally, those incidental features of servitude which are usually little thought of, but which are the overflow of its cup of abominations. We look upon the writing of this book as providential, and upon it as the best missionary God has yet sent into the field to plead for his poor and oppressed children at the South. Such a book was a necessity of the age, and had to be written, and we are grateful to God that he put the writing of it into the hands of one who has interwoven Evangelical influences with every page of its narrative, and compressed many a Gospel sermon into its field and fireside converse. Its appeal to our sympathies is genuine. It artlessly pictures facts, and the facts make us feel. We have never read a story of more power. We doubt if anybody has. The human being who can read it through with dry eyes, is commended to Barnum.”

— Anon. [Gamaliel Bailey], Review of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *The National Era* 15 April 1852

On the other hand, there were vehement reactions against Stowe’s message in proslavery publications, especially in the South. George F. Holmes, for example, in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, attacked Stowe as unfeminine: ‘But where a writer of the softer sex manifests, in her productions, a shameless disregard of truth and those amenities which so peculiarly belong to her sphere of life, we hold that she has forfeited the claim to be considered a lady’ (*The Southern Literary Messenger*, October 1852). Given this scale of attention, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* unavoidably became internationally famous and ever more widely read. When Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe at the White House in 1862, he is reported (perhaps apocryphally) to have exclaimed, ‘So this is the little lady who made this big war’.
Uncle Tom has always proved to be a controversial text. This is particularly the case when the responses of African Americans are considered. At the very start, some enthusiasm was shown, as in this review appearing in the famous abolitionist, Frederick Douglass’s *Paper:

**UNCLE TOM’S CABIN, or LIFE AMONG THE LOWLY, By Harriet Beecher Stowe. 2 vols. Boston, John P. Jewett and Co.**

This work has not yet reached us, from the publishers: but when we hear that the first edition of five thousand copies (issued on the 20th of March) was sold in four days, we are not surprised at the delay.

This thrilling Story, from the accomplished pen of Mrs. Stowe, has appeared week after week, by instalments, in the *National Era*, and has been perused with intense interest by thousands of people. The friends of freedom owe the Authoress a large debt of gratitude for this essential service, rendered by her to the cause they love.

We are well sure that the touching portraiture she has given of “poor Uncle Tom” will, of itself, enlist the kindly sympathies, of numbers, in behalf of the oppressed African race, and will raise up a host of enemies against the fearful system of slavery.

Mrs. Stowe has, in this work, won for herself a place among American writers—She has evinced great keenness of insight into the workings of slavery, and a depth of knowledge of all its various parts, such as few writers have equalled, and none, we are sure, have exceeded. She has wonderful powers of description, and invests her characters with a reality perfectly life-like. Fine as she is in description, she is not less so in argumentation. We doubt if abler arguments have ever been presented, in favour of the “Higher Law” theory, than may be found here. Mrs. Stowe’s truly great work is destined to occupy a niche in every American Library, north of “Mason and Dixon’s.”

— Unsigned [probably Frederick Douglass], Rochester: *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 1 April 1852.

By the end of the Civil War, however, Douglass’s attitude had changed:

What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply justice. The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us. … I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, if they are worm eaten at the core, if they are early ripe and disposed to fall, let them fall! I am not for tying or fastening them on the tree in any way, except by nature’s plan, and if they will not stay there, let them fall. And if the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone! If you see him on his way to school, let him alone, don’t disturb him! If you see him going to the dinner table at a hotel, let him go! If you see him going to the ballot-box, let him alone, — your interference is doing him a positive injury. … If you will only untie his hands, and give him a chance, I think he will live. He will work as readily for himself as the white man. A great many delusions have been swept away by this war. One was, that the Negro would not work; he has proved his ability to work. Another was, that the Negro would not fight; that he possessed only the most sheepish attributes of humanity; was a perfect lamb, or an “Uncle Tom”; disposed to take off his coat whenever required, fold his hands, and be whipped by anybody who wanted to whip him. But the war has proved that there is a great deal of human nature in the Negro, and that “he will fight,” as Mr. Quincy, our President, said, in earlier days than these … .

— Frederick Douglass, ‘*What the Black Man Wants*’, Speech at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in Boston, April 1865.

Subsequently, Douglass’s 1865 reservations have been taken up with interest. For example, by 1925 William Stanley Braithwaite, in his book, *The Negro in American Literature* ended up as far from enthusiastic:

Controversy and moral appeal gave us *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, — the first conspicuous example of the Negro as a subject for literary treatment. Published in 1852, it dominated in mood and attitude the American literature of a whole generation … Here was sentimentalized sympathy for a down-trodden race, but one in which was projected a character, in Uncle Tom himself, which has been unequalled in its hold upon the popular imagination to this day. But the moral
gain and historical effect of Uncle Tom have been artistic loss and setback. The treatment of Negro life and character, overlaid with these forceful stereotypes, could not develop into artistically satisfactory portraiture’ — William Stanley Braithwaite, *The Negro in American Literature*, New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925.

For many African American critics in the decades following World War Two *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* stands as an example of a white-authored text fundamentally misrepresenting African Americans and their history and prone to offering up stereotypes conforming to ‘minstrel’ traditions representing African Americans negatively. In 1949 James Baldwin even went so far as to suggest that, by trying to frighten people into opposing slavery by threatening them with damnation if they did not, Stowe’s novel was stoking up a hysteria akin to that found in lynch-mobs: ‘*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* then, is activated by what might be called a theological terror, the terror of damnation; and the spirit that breathes in this book, hot, self-righteous, fearful, is not different … from that terror which activates a lynch mob’. Indeed, by 1956, J. C. Furnas was suggesting that ‘American Negroes have made [Stowe’s] titular hero [Tom] a hissing and a byword’ (J. C. Furnas, *Goodbye to Uncle Tom*, New York: William Sloane, 1956; Furnas alludes to Jeremiah 29:18). Faced with such criticisms, some post-war editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* responded by depicting Tom in a heroic guise quite different from the sentimentalised versions that predominated before.

On the other hand, during this period feminist critics increasingly saw in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a classic sentimental text displaying the virtues of caring, nurturing and passive resistance to injustice — identified as female virtues making women superior to men, whose man’s world of masculine action leads to violence and destruction. Such feminists contrast, for example, the kitchen of Rachel, the Quaker abolitionist pacifist who shelters the fugitive slaves Eliza and George in *Uncle Tom*, with the masculine laissez-faire world of commerce and profit, and see Rachel as offering a preferable, alternative mode of social organization. Such debates look set to continue, and sustain interest in Stowe’s classic text into the twenty-first century, along with increasing consideration of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* transnational status.

This website is designed to explore the complex dimensions of visual illustrations of the story of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* found in published versions of the book over the decades of the nineteenth and twentieth century, up to 1970, and to consider how these have contributed to and helped shape such debates.

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin through the decades: a story told in illustrations*

R. J. Ellis with Sara Griffiths
As this website makes clear, _Uncle Tom_ was, from its very first appearance, not only attracted huge sales in the USA, but was even more frequently reprinted in Britain, not only in order to mobilize opinion against the continuation of slavery of any kind anywhere in the world (before the Civil War, the book’s prime purpose was US slavery’s abolition), but also for its Christian moral instruction and for its sentimental power. The transatlantic debates that resulted make this text an integral part of any understanding of transatlantic culture and what Paul Gilroy called the “Black Atlantic” — a flow of cultural and intellectual changes prompted by and promoted by the growth of the African Diaspora, African culture and responses and counter-responses to slavery, racism, discrimination and black resistance (*The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, New York: Verso, 1993).

Another pronounced feature in the publishing history of _Uncle Tom_ was the way that in the early years of its existence it was not protected by copyright and many pirated editions existed — indeed, it is possible, though unlikely, that the first book-form version of _Uncle Tom_ was a pirated edition, printed before the ‘first edition’ appeared. One very early edition was brought out by Clarke and Company in 1852:
This 1852 edition shows all the signs of having been put together hastily. For example, it has two title pages, one bearing the legend, “The People’s Illustrated Edition”, apparently overprinted onto a pre-existing title page – which suggests the edition appearing here was not the first one published by Clarke and Co., whilst the second title page (below) depicts Uncle Tom’s Cabin:
Another sign of how this edition was very early was the relative crudeness of the drawings (by an unnamed illustrator). Yet, already, some of what will become the stock images of illustrators can be seen coming to the fore: in the next illustration (below), Eva and Uncle Tom appear together — and, as will often be the case, Eva is in Uncle Tom’s arms. Her quasi-angelic status here is enhanced by her sun-bonnet (which almost doubles as a halo and/or wings), whilst the sexual menace attributed to the black man by racists is defused by Tom’s expression of pious rapture. The poorness of the draftsmanship is, however, almost as striking, as the artist’s control of perspective collapses:
‘Your little child is your only true democrat’, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Negro Life in the Slave States of America with Fifty Splendid Engravings*, London: Clarke and Co., 1852

Piety and Christian conversion are already establishing themselves as dominant themes:
‘Little Eva converting Topsy’, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Negro Life in the Slave States of America with Fifty Splendid Engravings*, London: Clarke and Co., 1852, facing p. 239

Indeed, sometimes the Christian message is laid on with a trowel, making ever more dramatic the underlying themes of Christian conversion, Christian suffering and Christian eternal hope:
Not all of the illustrations in this 1852 Clarke and Company edition were without merit: the stock depiction of Eliza’s daring escape possesses substantial energy in its representation of her flight across the Ohio River:
‘Lizzy’s bridge—The article exhibits the dominion of eternal love’, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Negro Life in the Slave States of America with Fifty Splendid Engravings*, London: Clarke and Co., 1852, facing p. 111.

In this edition, like many other early editions, the brutality of slavery also figures large:
‘Scenes daily and hourly acting under the shadow of the American Law’, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Negro Life in the Slave States of America with Fifty Splendid Engravings*, London: Clarke and Co., 1852, facing p. 95.

Even just glancing at such illustrations in the early editions of *Uncle Tom* make it clear why storm clouds quickly gathered around this text. Such illustrations establish how Stowe, for all of her abolitionist sympathies, all too often allowed her text to offer up stereotypical portraits of powerless, suffering African Americans, which the illustrators then pass on visually. Consequently, most African Americans and some abolitionists, from the start, were made uneasy. A few of the early illustrations also, very unhelpfully, tended to feature a voyeuristic, almost salacious, and even pornographic take on the text. If the Clarke and Co. illustration above seems to pander to such voyeuristic pleasures (notice the observer watching the whipping), then other editions make this propensity even plainer (and, again, pruriently observed though a doorway) — Ingram Cooke’s being a good case in point:
These images would have been highly shocking in 1850s America, at a time when the female form was conventionally kept well-concealed. To legitimate such a portrait in this instance, Ingram Cooke’s edition carefully emphasizes in its footing that the incident is to do with issues of religiosity: “George’s Sister whipped for wishing to live a Decent Christian Life”. This is an attempt to deflect away any scandal over the depiction of the whipped female slave’s naked torso — even though her pose here is contrived to allow a full-frontal view. Dominant notions of propriety are being crossed in such pictures. A sign of this is the way that, even in the Southern US States a subject of debate (disgracefully enough) was whether female slaves should be stripped to the waist before being whipped, since to do so exposed their breasts to view. The Peeping Toms’ recurrent appearance and voyeuristic gaze in illustrations in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, it can be argued, underlines the way in which arousing Christians’ anger is not the sole purpose of these illustrations. Early illustrators tended to feature prominently the practice of whipping female slaves not solely because they thereby
highlighted the perverse cruelty of slavery but also because they intimated the sexual excesses
the institution allowed and permitted the reader to share vicariously in these illicit thrills.
Indeed, early English editions made such portraits a regular feature, as in the following, by
George Cruikshank in 1852, which was to be widely reproduced:

George Cruikshank, ‘Persecuted Virtue. “She was whipped, sir, for wanting to live a decent Christian life …”’.
Uncle Tom’s Cabin, London: John Cassell, 1852

This print’s title, ‘Persecuted Virtue. “She was whipped, sir, for wanting to live a decent Christian life, such as your laws give no slave girl a right to live!”’ comes from Chapter X of
the novel: ‘The Property Is Carried Off’. The illustration relates to a very small part of one of
George’s speeches to the good-natured Mr. Wilson, endeavoring to persuade him of the evils
of slavery. That Cruikshank, like so many others, chooses to illustrate not an actual event in
the text but instead a briefly-reported episode, the whipping of a female slave, that is not part
of the main action surely helps fuel one line of contention developed by Stowe’s critics: that
her novel in some way feeds the voyeuristic, even sadistic, strand running through anti-
slavery narratives, bringing such accounts into a disturbing propinquity with Victorian-era
pornography — an argument that is one source of the controversy surrounding the text.
Arguably, however, in this case, the quotidian seaminess of Cruikshanks’ scene somewhat
mitigates against such a reading, or, rather, mitigates it a little.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin was very frequently reprinted not only in 1852, but also in successive
years up to the Civil War and regularly thereafter. It was probably read by over one million
people before slavery was abolished in the USA. Uncle Tom’s Cabin eventually sold more
copies in the nineteenth century than any other book except the Bible. Progressively, during
the century, the presentation of the novel — the way it was ‘framed’ — became increasingly
sentimentalized. This development in the novel’s representation can be traced in the editions
of Uncle Tom’s Cabin featured on this website.
Many different illustrators worked on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, apart from George Cruikshank (Charles Dickens’ preferred illustrator, who illustrated the novel in 1852) — but his are particularly famous, and make it all too clear how ‘minstrel’ traditions play a role in their visualization:


Harriet Beecher Stowe had not visited the South when she composed *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and relied heavily on secondary sources, which she researched quite assiduously, though it has to be added that she read her sources with the eyes of a convinced opponent of slavery. She was to be attacked by proslavery advocates, who alleged her book was full of inaccuracies, exaggerations and propaganda seeking to discredit her. In her own defense she cited her sources in another book, published in 1853: *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. This systematically sought to show how *Uncle Tom* accurately depicted slavery. The book’s contents pages make clear the topics covered by this systematic documentation:
A crucial source for Stowe had been *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1839). This long, 224 page pamphlet was extensively used as a source of information by Harriet Beecher Stowe when composing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. She identified it as one of the seeds from which *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* grew.
The author (or, rather, compiler) of *American Slavery As It Is*, Theodore Dwight Weld, had determined to seek to annihilate the pro-slavery argument with meticulously documented evidence of slavery’s multiple brutalities. Working together with Angelina Grimké Weld, his wife, and Sarah Grimké, her sister, he interviewed escaped slaves, abolitionists and between 1837 to 1839 worked through well over twenty thousand copies of Southern and Northern newspaper accounts of practices in the South’s ‘peculiar institution’, compiling his evidence.
The resulting work was first published anonymously in 1839 and sold 100,000 copies in its first year. Printed in double columns, to give an impression of the immediacy of newspaper reportage, it makes for shocking, if dry, reading in its cumulative documentation of slavery’s multiple horrors, and it had a huge impact.

Weld deliberately chose to foreground the accounts of Southern newspapers in his pamphlet, so enabling him to claim that, since ‘A majority of the facts and testimony contained in this work rests upon the authority of slaveholders, whose names and residences are given to the public, as vouchers for the truth of their statements’, the reader could only conclude that ‘that they should utter falsehoods, for the sake or proclaiming their own infamy, is not probable’. (Theodore Dwight Weld, ‘Advertisement to the Reader’, p. iii). Readers still left skeptical are urged to attend the offices of the Anti Slavery Society to read the original newspapers (p. iii). Doubtless one motive in advancing this invitation was to seek to recruit any such visitors to the cause, for the Anti Slavery Society had only been founded in 1833 — six years earlier — by William Lloyd Garrison and others. American Slavery sensationally featured a 32 page section on ‘Punishments’. These included ‘Flogging’, ‘Tortures’, ‘Branding’, ‘Maiming’, ‘Scars’, ‘Mutilation of Teeth’ and ‘Cruelties’, with the examples given mostly culled from Southern newspapers. Such details, along with those in other sections, such as ‘Privations of the Slaves’ and ‘Testimonies’ by anti-slavery activists were interleaved with narratives by ex-slaves, telling of their trials. The pamphlet ends by countering head-on the pro-slavery ‘Objections’ to the anti-slavery position.
Stowe’s *Key* spelt out how such sources and documents as *Slavery As It Is* had been used in writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The *Key* also featured corroborative statements from slaves and anti-slavery advocates. It is divided into four parts: Part I provides details upon what the portraits of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s characters were based; Part II details the legislative and institutional apparatuses Stowe had observed in preparing her portrait of slavery in the novel; Part III gives details of what Stowe had assembled concerning how slavery worked as an institution; and finally Part IV details the religious context underpinning the novel’s portrait of the Churches’ response to slavery.

*A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* opens with the words: ‘At different times, doubt has been expressed whether the representations of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” are a fair delineation of slavery as it presently exists. This work, more, perhaps, than any other work of fiction that ever was written, has been a collection and arrangement of real incidents, — of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered … [it is] a mosaic of facts’ (p.1). For a time in the mid 1850s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was often bound with the *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as part of Stowe’s defensive strategy in countering her critics. Ironically, as Stowe labored to ensure her accounts were supported by well-documented evidences, the illustrations attached to her work were often playing fast and loose with her words. By doing so they accentuated the ways in which Stowe’s text was not just a documentary account, — a mosaic of facts — but a fictionalization of polemical intent, designed to oppose slavery as effectively as it could.

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[Proceed to: The First Edition of Uncle Tom’s Cabin](#)
1. The First Edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

Anxiety about the scale of Southern attacks upon *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* may account for the relatively subdued restraint to be found in the illustrations to be found in the first authorized edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, when this two volume edition was published in Boston by John P. Jewett in 1852, following its serialization. The portrait of the slave auction produced by Hammatt Billings can serve as an example:


Stowe’s novel was so popular that even during the first year of publication, 1852, several printings occurred. The copy from which these original illustrations by Hammatt Billings are taken comes from the ‘tenth thousandth’ print run. The illustrator tended to seek to bring a relatively documentary approach to the task, though sentimentalism often also breaks through.

Hammatt Billings, ‘Little Eva Reading the Bible to Uncle Tom in the Arbor’, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Vol. 2, Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852, p. 63
The character of Uncle Tom is frequently criticized, particularly by post World War Two African Americans, as overly passive and too patient in his suffering. The sentimentalized representation of Tom featured above, and a much later one, of Cassy nursing Uncle Tom after his whipping (below) might well be held to support such a reading. On the other hand, Cassy is to undergo something of a conversion as a result of her encounter with Tom, and Tom himself has been whipped to the point of death because he has refused to flog another slave, Lucy. It therefore could be argued that Tom is offering effective Christian resistance. However, it also has to be said that Tom never offers any physical resistance. The debate about Stowe’s portrayal of Tom and its acceptability continues. But Hammatt Billings’ pictures, it can be argued, were not helpful to the argument that Tom is not reduced to the status of a passive victim. Here, helpless, he is being tended by a female — the beautiful, light-skinned Cassie:

‘Cassy ministering to Uncle Tom after his whipping’, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Vol. 2, Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852, p. 198.

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[Proceed to: Other Early Editions](#)
2. Other early editions

Other early editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were often pirated, and nearly always copiously illustrated.


The illustrations in this very early pirated edition tends to work almost exclusively within a strand of dark Gothicism that runs only as a subdued under-current through the illustrations by Billings in the first ‘authorized’ edition.


This illustration can be directly compared to that of Billings. Cassie, on Ingram Cooke’s title-page, is rendered up in a more ladylike pose, accentuating her ‘near-white’ status (in terms of her skin color). Most of the ‘eight spirited engravings’ in this pirated 1852 edition accentuate action and heighten the drama:
Stock dramatic scenes like this one of Eliza crossing the Ohio River were soon to become a common focus for illustrators, as was the slave woman hurling herself to death after having her children sold away from her at the auction block:
One eye of the publisher in including such dramatic engravings is plainly upon his profits. This means that the sentimentalism is more restrained than in Hammatt’s pictures; inevitably, given its centrality in Stowe’s novel, it also features, as in this portrait of Little Eva dying, her bed attended by an angel as well as Uncle Tom:
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly. A Tale of Slave Life in America*
London: John Cassell, 1852

The edition that was illustrated by George Cruikshank became particularly famous. Cruikshank brought his very individual and dramatic illustrating style (so beloved by Charles Dickens) to the twenty-seven engravings in this edition.

A problem with Cruikshank’s style, for all of its vividness, was its very clear tendency to degenerate into highly stereotyped portraits, sometimes almost cartoonish in their impact — making them potentially offensive:

Whilst the shocking action is vividly realized here, the features of the African American, Scipio are exaggeratedly disfigured by his fear. But Cruikshank did have a fine sense of which scenes to illustrate and how to illustrate them, as in the picture of Eliza fleeing across the ice-packs with her son:


Or, just as famously, his illustration of the slave-market auction-block; in this illustration it is noticeable that the slave-auction is a more raucous and threatening place than that offered by Hammatt Billings in the first authorized edition. The neo-classical statues looking down, horrified, upon the scene allude also to how Enlightenment principles were shattered by this practice. Cruikshank plainly also has a sharper eye on the commercial impact of his engravings:
Another example of this commercial acuity of Cruikshank is his recognition of the central importance of death scenes:

In fact, it was to be the death of Little Eva that was to appear more commonly in other editions, but the display of grief here by the African American Tom over St Clare’s death was to be frequently carried over into scenes of Little Eva’s death. It is worth noticing, too, how the posture of Tom in this engraving somewhat echoes that of the slave on Josiah Wedgwood’s famous anti-slavery medallion:
‘Am I not a Man and a brother?’ Josiah Wedgwood, ca.1787

Both Uncle Tom in Cruikshank’s illustrations and Wedgwood’s slave on his anti-slavery medallion have been attacked for the passivity they depict. This parallel between the two makes plain why such attacks have occurred: the trope of black helplessness was a pervasive one in white anti-slavery circles.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly. A Tale of Slave Life in America
London: Nathaniel Cooke, 1853

The illustrations in this next early edition makes clear how much gothic sensationalism was used to sell this book, and the risks attached to this sort of depiction of Uncle Tom’s adventures.
This typical early reprint is a sign of how the British book-publishing industry was more established than its US equivalent. Because of this, most of the reprints were carried out in Britain. At this time, books were not published with dust jackets, so printing the title on the cover in an attractive way helped induce the bookshop browser to pick the book up.

As early as 1853, it can be argued, certain scenes from the novel had already achieved an iconic status. Certainly this next composition drew on a well-established theme, and, in this instance, a capable illustrator renders it up in a particularly striking way:
Such illustrations as these, like the attractive, tooled cover, could lure a would-be purchaser: flicking though the book’s pages and encountering such dramatic renderings certainly helped sell the book. However, using illustrations in this way as a marketing tool meant that the scenes depicted tended to be ones where in some way a level of exoticism, action, danger even titillation was involved. Or, of course, high emotion:
This tendency of early illustrations to seek out some sort of sensational impact did much to render the book problematic, as when, for example, Cassy was portrayed as a beautiful, all-but-white woman when she was, in the book, depicted as one of the more active and energetic African American characters opposing slavery. Her depiction as an almost-white heroine also tended to detract from any sense of African American agency in the book:
— as did the often near-white appearance of George and Eliza, who both also actively oppose slavery. But the key problem was the way in which all too often the illustrator’s resort was to stereotypical caricature:
From *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly. A Tale of Slave Life in America*. London: Nathaniel Cooke, 1853.

Such images as these by white illustrators left no space for African Americans to feel comfortable within, nor could they be relaxed about the way they were portrayed as grotesque clowns or gambolling dancers.
From *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly. A Tale of Slave Life in America*. London: Nathaniel Cooke, 1853.
3. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin in the Post-Bellum Victorian Era*

As time passes after the first publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the moment of emancipation during the Civil War recedes, the focus of the illustrations, now firmly dating from the mid-Victorian era, became ever more sentimental, as the next several editions demonstrate.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; A Tale of Life Among the Lowly***  
London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1887.

The firm of Frederick Warne was to prove a prolific publisher of editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. This mid-Victorian edition, part of the ‘Incident and Adventure Library’, consistently emphasized, on its cover and in its choice of illustrations, the sentimental side of its story and its potential to provide religious instruction concerning humble religious piety. The cover here is particularly compelling in this respect. The image of Little Eva sitting on Uncle Tom’s knee had by this time become one of the most iconic in the book.
This edition claims to supply ‘original illustrations’. It does not, of course, do this much at all, but rather draws on established illustrative tropes, though the selection of silver on the book’s cover to highlight Little Eva against the black of Uncle Tom disturbingly exaggerates their difference in appearance, in what might be held to be a particularly loaded fashion. By now, stereotypical subjects are almost always predominant — with virtually no surprises — as in this depiction of the fleeing Eliza — with her apparel somewhat updated (again, quite typically). The escape across the Ohio River was of course established as one main visual trope:

**Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; A Tale of Life Among the Lowly***  

This is an example of an edition with illustrations of a slightly more elaborate standard to that found in the Warne edition. Though the images are stock ones, they are nevertheless striking in their composition. Included, of course, is the high sentimentalism of Eliza fleeing across the river on the book’s frontispiece to Tom grieving by Littler Eva’s deathbed.
But we also get reference to the violence of slavery, even if this is somewhat toned down now the realities have receded, along with abolitionist activity.
However, some images are particularly striking, as in the case of a highly exoticised Topsy — a stock image, it is true, but in this case it is given a particularly creative twist:
Images such as these stand in quite sharp contrast to the more typical Victorian fare of mid-to-late Victorian editions, which were steadily becoming more concertedly sentimentalized and less inventive.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe**, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; A Tale of Life Among the Lowly*

In this undated edition (c. 1895), the frontispiece picture of Eliza being rescued from the ice-floe filled river shows well how much the story had become increasingly sentimentalized by its framing illustrations.
Frontispiece, ‘He roughly, but kindly, drew her up the steep bank’, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, London, Walter Scott Publishing Company Ltd, c. 1890-1900.

This frontispiece illustration can serve to usher us into a period of sickly sentimentalism in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s publishing history.

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[Proceed to: The Rise and Rise of Sentimentalism and Children’s Editions]
4. The rise and rise of sentimentalism and children’s editions

By the end of the nineteenth century children’s editions were becoming common, and in these the sentimentalism was ratcheted up several notches, both in the way they were (usually) abridged and in their illustrations. Such editions could be quite lavish in their production.

*Old Stories Told Anew: Uncle Tom’s Cabin, by Harriet Beecher Stowe*
Edited by Julia S.E. Rae, with original illustrations by Florence Maplestone. London: Trischler and Company 1891

A richly-produced edition published in London in 1891 by Trischler and Company ideally introduces this section:


Published in the *Old Stories Told Anew* series, this children’s edition is especially notable for its striking use of pastel colors, creating what might be called a restrained but full-blown sentimentalism.
Unashamedly aimed at the child reader, this edition’s sheer lavishness stands as a testimony to the book’s enduring popularity in its super-sentimentalized wrappings.

Just what is happening to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in this sentimentalized transmogrification becomes clear when we see Emmeline on the slave block. In this illustration Emmeline is
rendered so white as to suggest visually a tale of white slavery is being told rather than one of African American immiseration.

By the 1890s, the apotheosis of Eva was also complete and the story shortened to accentuate its sentimentality. It is perhaps this legacy of Stowe’s novel that led African Americans in the post World War Two period to object to it so strongly.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin***

The Trischler edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had been, typically, substantially abridged; other editions intended for slightly older children, were not, though the sentimentalism was not much reduced, as this Sunday School Union edition dating from 1896, makes blatant through its cover design:

In recognition of the fact that the book’s target audience was slightly older, however, the conventional, sentimental-sensational image of Eliza fleeing across the river features as the book’s frontispiece.
Exceptions to this general rule of ever-intensifying sentimentalism were those reprints that, with increasing rareness, returned to some of the original illustrations, of which Cruikshank’s 1852 depictions were the most popular by far. An 1897 Bliss Sands and Company edition adopted this approach for its frontispiece, but in this instance the selection of the print deserves comment. The Cruikshank engraving chosen was ‘Persecuted Virtue. “She was whipped, sir, for wanting to live a decent Christian life, such as your laws give no slave girl a right to live!”’.
George Cruikshank, “‘She was whipped, sir, for wanting to live a decent Christian life …’”, rpt. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, London: Bliss, Sands and Company, 1897

Its re-appearance serves as a reminder that just possibly one appeal of *Uncle* Tom was still the voyeuristic sadomasochism that can be held to run through it, which, as we have seen, illustrators had exploited in early editions. Certainly we know that depictions of chained, naked females frequently appear in Victorian ‘high cultural’ art forms, either as classical studies or as studies of female (often white) slaves.

The Victorian collector, Sir Merton Russell Cotes, exemplifies such tastes. For example, there is a statue he owned of a naked female, the ‘Shiva Slave’ (aka ‘The Greek Slave’), on display at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum. The work is by Gerolamo Oldofredi, a Milanese exhibiting in Rome, Venice and Milan during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The sculpture dates to circa 1880-1900 and was collected by Sir Merton Russell Cotes at the beginning of the twentieth century. This illustrations is directly related to slavery
as an institution, to tap into the obscenely asymmetrical power relations that slavery set up and which could be readily exploited:

Gerolamo Oldofredi, ‘Shiva Slave’ (aka ‘The Greek Slave’), c. 1880-1900. (The Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth.)

As striking is the painting by Arthur Hill that Sir Merton Russell Cotes collected, entitled ‘Andromeda’ (1875-76). This classical study of a despairing, chained, white female, like the statue of the Shiva slave, dwells lovingly on the rounded form of the female:
However, such artworks were held in private collections or museums. It has to be said that encountering Cruikshank’s sensational illustrations was by the 1890s becoming increasingly uncommon. Rather, *Uncle Tom* was largely being handed over to a child readership, and its images were laundered in the process, for moral and historical instruction – hence the emphasis on Eva and/or Tom reading that now becomes predominant in compositions depicting the pair.

*A Young Folks Edition: Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe*  
Chicago, M.A. Donohue and Co., n.d. [c. 1900]

A striking example of how learning to read was foregrounded comes from the cover of a cheaply-produced and heavily abridged children’s version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: 
This is a particularly arresting example of the sentimentalization of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, featuring the by-now iconographic image of Uncle Tom and Little Eva (which had also long been the subject of Staffordshire flat-back mass-produced ceramics, from the early 1850s onwards).

This M.A. Donohue edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is particularly striking for the variations in its visual style, however — featuring as it did, for example, this faintly art nouveau plate, featuring an unusually aged Uncle Tom:
It has to be added, too, that in this M.A. Donohue edition the very varied stylistic approach to the illustrations also includes two scenes referencing the more violent and disgraceful aspects of slavery:
But, in editions aimed at children, such an image is, simply, the exception. Rather, high sentimentalism dominates — as it does in most other modes of releasing the novel in the nineteenth century.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

This pocket edition, which went through many different editions in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, with its frontispiece illustration regularly updated, typifies the sort of illustration that predominates in its early twentieth century edition:
Probably published in the 1900s, long after the end of Civil War, this pocket edition was brought out by English publishers Milner and Company, which specialized in cheap versions of popular novels. That it featured in Milner’s ‘Juvenile Series’ underlines the novel’s established role as a source of instruction for youngsters in Christian fortitude and charity. Pocket editions were very popular: as the habit of traveling grew, people could pull them out to read on the long, slow journeys by stagecoach or, later, railway. In this sense such pocket editions were the forerunners of the twentieth century paperback. This Milner edition had been regularly reprinted since the 1860s. The following image of a frontispiece and title page is taken from an 1866 Milner edition, and by comparing it with the frontispiece above, it can be clearly seen how illustrators had, across the decades, somewhat racked up the stress on high domestic sentimentality whilst also updating the costumes of the protagonists (in this instance the resemblance of Little Eva to Cruikshank’s illustrations of little girls for Dickens in the frontispiece of the 1866 edition stands in contrast to the relatively revealing costume of Little Eva in the later edition, reproduced above):
That Stowe’s *Uncle Tom* retained sufficient popularity so long after slavery’s abolition as to command regular reprinting in a pocket edition is an indication of how the book was read as a story leading to Christian improvement.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin***
London, Glasgow and Bombay, Blackie and Son Ltd, n.d. [c.1905]

Buoyed by its enduring popularity, as its blend of sentimentalism, sensation, Christian conversion and moral improvement still held an audience even as slavery further faded as an issue, editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* continued to proliferate, appearing in numerous formats — as is the case in this undated late Victorian or early Edwardian edition, with an attractive Art Nouveau cover design.
Open the covers, however, and the frontispiece illustration strikes an almost wholly conventional note. Its depiction of Little Eva and Uncle Tom, provides another example of how dominant this image had become by the turn of the century.

In this instance, however, the class issues bubbling away on the surface in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* are picked up with interest, as Tom is rendered as footman serving the needs of an upper class or *haute bourgeois* Little Eva — though, of course, as we have by now seen, the updating of the clothing style (here of Little Eva) is, effectively, an established convention in Victorian illustrations.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin***.

When examining Victorian and early Edwardian edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a certain monotony sets in. Striking covers can, however, still result, as is the case with this edition from circa 1907:
This reprint again addresses the requirement that, before dust jackets became commonplace, books needed to attract readers by way of the design of their binding, for example by placing an illustration of a scene from the novel on the front-cover board itself. The scene selected is, unsurprisingly, both one featuring Uncle Tom and Little Eva (a very Victorianised Little Eva) and one involving learning to read. Inside, one of Symington’s plates can serve to remind us of the problematic minstrelization of the African American characters — none more so than Topsy:

It remains easy to see, from this illustration, how offence can be caused when picking up an edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

*Tales for Little People: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Other Stories*, edited by Lady Kathleen
London: Aldine Publishing Company, 1911

After the end of the Victorian era, abridged versions for children continued to proliferate. A striking example is the very cheaply produced version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the Tales for Little People series of 1911.
Here, the sentimentalized reading scene between Uncle Tom and Eva — by now wholly to be predicted — is complicated by the appearance of Uncle Tom in a top hat — rendering him curiously ‘Other’ — in this case, certainly, with a taint of minstrel stereotype creeping into his ambiguous representation. Obviously aimed at children and designed to appeal to them (‘Pretty Pictures, Large Type’), the book, like so many Uncle Tom’s Cabins, offers up a disturbingly-racialized iconography.

Within this pamphlet’s pages, another pattern becomes apparent — as never before, perhaps, but still as part of a pattern: this is the way in which, consistently, in illustrations for editions of Uncle Tom, almost all whipping scenes depict African American on African American whippings:


Here, in this instance in a mass-circulation pamphlet aimed at children, a particular construction is placed on the source of violence in slaveholding — instigated by whites, it is, however, always laid on by blacks. A total of three of the images in an abridged version of the story lasting for only 30 pages depict two of Stowe’s peripheral characters, the black overseers, Sambo and Quimbo, whips in hand. If a white (Legree) holds a whip, then it is only in the background:

In a book so heavily aimed at children (Tales for Little People), this emphasis on blacks whipping blacks and their depiction as ‘savage’ introduces an almost menacing amount of racist ideology into the equation. The rise of a refreshed scientific racism rooted in alleged proofs of mental feebleness at this time (just before World War One) provides one context for viewing this startling imbalance in the distribution of illustrations across the tale.

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Proceed to: A tipping point: the middle decades of the twentieth century
5. A tipping point: the middle decades of the twentieth century

Even after World War One, sentimentalism still predominated, but the inter-war decades were not to prove static.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

This 1922 edition shows how nothing immediately changed in the fervid atmosphere following World War One, as modernity tightened its grip.

All the ingredients we have come to expect are present: high sentimentalism; an anachronistic modernization of apparel; an exploitation of an iconic scene for commercial advantage; and an emphasis on religious conversion, moral instruction, and education (literacy). The design appears on the hardcover, but it needs to be noted that by now dust jackets were beginning to be more widely and commonly used.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
With designs by James Daugherty. New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1929

However, during this post-World War One period, a particularly startling *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was published. This was an edition brought out by Coward-McCann, featuring drawings and designs by the well-known illustrator, James Daugherty.
Daugherty came briefly into the spotlight in 2006, when his depiction of Israel Putnam, the hero of Bunker Hill, in a mural commissioned by the WPA and placed in Hamilton Avenue School in Greenwich, Connecticut, in 1935, was restored to reveal a violent scene, including snarling animals, tomahawk-brandishing American Indians and a half-clothed General Putnam tied to a stake in a bonfire. The school’s administrators objected to the violence revealed by the restoration and ordered that the mural be removed. Daugherty’s images in his *Uncle Tom* illustrations are equally disconcerting, from the disturbingly stereotyped and minstrelized Topsy on the book’s front cover through to the many images within the book’s pages which reinforce the more or less racist stereotyping carried on the cover:

The over-done portrait of African American carnival carries within it all the exaggeration of minstrelsy, with all the connotations of racial condescension and prejudice that this carries. But the portrait of Topsy is a truly shocking epitome in this respect:
We certainly need to remind ourselves at this point that the book actually advertises itself on its front cover as having been ‘edited specially for children;’ and that it ‘is admirably suited for use both in home and at school’. Again, the capacity for this text to misguide people into racist ways of thinking is enhanced by its illustrations.

Having said this, Daugherty’s images can project a more ambiguous set of connotations. The double-page spread on pages 162-163 — near the center of the book — exemplifies this. The ‘lower deck’ (left) half of the picture, depicting the ‘lower deck’ on the paddle-steamer, the Belle Riviere, contains both stereotypical exaggerations and caricatures of what Stowe ironically calls ‘the freight’ — a phrase which loses much of the force of its irony in a welter of ambiguities about how to read the depictions. The African bodies are exposed to view — both the central chained man and, to his left, the woman with her torso and breasts bare — produced for (white) consumption as an exotic ‘Other’. But also some sense of both nobility and suffering is conveyed (though perhaps too much tending towards ‘nobility in suffering’, with all its connotations of passivity and acquiescence). Meanwhile, the upper deck, ‘crowded with well-dressed ladies and gentlemen’, carries far from idealized portraits of the white Americans on the steamship — with the men coming across as more-or-less effeminate rakes and the women ignorant snobs, unable to see the realities of slavery (the African American holding the horses’ bridle – Tom?). The exception is the young girl (Eva?), who reaches out
toward the lower decks (whose black inhabitants do not notice her gesture), but with a facial expression that is a curious amalgam of hauteur and condescension:

James Daugherty, [Illustration],

Contemplating the ambiguities of this illustration is one way of leading on to a consideration of arguably even more unsettling images. It is difficult to be sure what to make of the image of “Human Property is high in the market” on page 315. Plainly it is, again, laden with stereotyping and carries a prurience within its portrait of a female naked from the waist up. Yet there is also a disconcerting defiance in the posture of this woman on the auction block that is also redolent of knowingness — about what is to happen and perhaps how she will deal with it — which it is difficult to negotiate. In the end once again, certainly, negativity overwhelms the reader — the image might be reasonably categorized as racist. But this image is not unremittingly negative in its effect — it is deeply disturbing too:

The features of the black woman seems to carry in their delineations an allusion to those of the Statue of Liberty, in a pointed reference to how the institution of slavery had deprived a segment of the human race of their liberty and denied them proper human succor.

Another equally difficult image appears on page 351. Again, stereotypicality is laid on heavily – here black passivity and white dominance predominates, and the Christian motif supplied by the shadow transmogrifying into a cross cements this negative sense of passivity and helplessness. Yet, also, the clear allusion is to the slave (Tom) as Christ, in an image that is almost overwhelmingly powerful – it does indeed move the viewer. Again, one has to end on a note of censure, but the reader’s reaction, we contend, cannot be singular but must rather be divided along the dark parallel and jagged shadow-lines of the drawing, that suggest that darkness surrounds and invests slavery.
James Daugherty, ‘Yer mine, now, body and soul!’ *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1929, p. 315

However, we want to end by analyzing another extraordinary image, if only to drive home how we accept that Daugherty’s images end up as unacceptable. Here, in Eliza’s flight across the Ohio river on page 77, the way she is borne up by a white angel to aid her in her flight deprives her somewhat of her agency, and though the hand of what we take to be slavery that reaches up to drag her down is also white — and as such carries a strong sense of the sinister quality of the reach of white power, nevertheless she is caught between two white places in a profoundly negative portrait of her options: she is trapped into passivity as ‘the black mother’ — though it has to be said, ironically, that this draws out an aspect of Stowe’s text and its own shortcomings.

Perhaps Daugherty’s complexities have something to do with what was at that time the recent, 1925, Scopes trial — the famous ‘Scopes Monkey Trial’, as it was generally known — which tested the Tennessee law passed earlier in 1925 forbidding the teaching of evolution insofar as it suggested that humans were descended from animals and not made in God’s image. This of course inevitably renewed scientific racist debates about the relative evolutionary positions of blacks and whites and re-energized the disturbing currents of American racist discourse. Perhaps Daugherty’s images — to a degree — treat, if unsuccessfully, with these complexities.

After this explosive re-reading by Daugherty, most succeeding images come as something of an anticlimax. A modernism collides with Stowe’s sentimental novel in Daugherty’s complex, layered outlook on the text, but Stowe’s tale was by now so anchored in established pictorial iconographies that subsequent illustrators more or less were to retain their course.

Anon [abridged and adapted from Harriet Beecher Stowe], *Uncle Tom, Eva and Topsy*  
London and Edinburgh: McDougall’s Education Co., 1950
Inevitably, it seems, we must note how *Uncle Tom’s* ‘Sunday School Reading’ representational tradition, as it were, continues on — right into the second half of the twentieth century:


This cheap, abridged 1950s pamphlet even comes complete with improving exercises at the back:
‘Say, Write, and Do’, *Uncle Tom, Eva and Topsy*, London and Edinburgh, McDougall’s Education Co.1950, p. 64.

However, it needs to be noted that the image on the first page of this pamphlet points to the slave trade origins of the problem that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* addresses, however unsuccessfully. This point is picked up in the eighth exercise on the “Say, Write and Do” page (‘How did black slaves come to be in America?’). There are clear signs here, in the post World War Two period, of recognition that the colonial era is coming to an end in the 1950s and issues concerning the legacy of colonialism will need to be addressed. This suggestions reinforced by other editions from slightly later in this era, which tend to show an increasingly deminstrelized Tom, depicted with some degree of dignity.

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*Proceed to: The Decline of Territorial Colonization and the Changing Roles of Tom*
6. The decline of territorial colonization and the changing roles of Tom

It seems that the long-foreshadowed disintegration of the British Empire and the changing timbre of race relations that accompanied and preceded it, as perhaps prefigured in the rise of what Cesaire called, in French, ‘negritude’ and DuBoisian double consciousness, led to a re-estimation of how to present Tom visually in at least some of these transatlantic texts.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin***  
London and Glasgow: Blackie and Son Ltd., n.d. [c. 1955]

This edition offers a good example of how, often, though not always, Tom is somewhat deminstrelized in post World War Two editions, as decolonialization, and hence the meaning of colonialization, come to the fore.
There may be touches of stereotyping about Tom still (such as his bright red bow-tie in this picture), but now, also whites dance with comically impotent rage as Eliza secures her escape across the Ohio (in an allusion all the way back to Cruikshank).

**Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin***

This very cheaply produced, edition’s poorly drawn dust-jacket once again re-reads the relationship between Uncle Tom and Eva:

Again, Eva sits beneath Tom — this time literally at his feet, looking up to him as he reads — in what, on the face of it, looks like an inversion of how events unfold in Stowe’s text.
(However, of course, it is possible that Eva here performs ‘attentiveness’ in her attempt to encourage Tom to read.)

**Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin***  
Rylee Classics. London and Birmingham: Rylee Ltd 1965

This poorly-produced post-World War Two edition in the ‘Rylee Classics’ series, aimed at the children’s market, also marks the growing shift away from minstrelization. Though the dust jacket also shows that sentimentalization of the story continued well into the Twentieth Century, Eva is now looking up to Tom who interacts with her as an adult. The striped trousers are however, more ambiguous; they perhaps connote the minstrel tradition, though their red and white, combined with the blue of his shirt, just perhaps associate Tom with Uncle Sam somewhat as well:

![Dust jacket illustrations, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, London and Birmingham: Rylee Ltd. 1965.](image)

The dust jacket’s spine is, however, plainly not defensible, however merrily Topsy dances. She still comes off negatively – still minstrelized, even beyond what Stowe herself does to the character. Yet, overall, a shift can be discerned in these post-war images.
At about the same time as the Rylee classic bestows dignity on Tom, in a parallel but related development, Tom in some images garners up a black pride dimension as the 1960s draw to a close.

An abridged children’s edition, designed as a comic, displays this evolution strikingly. This edition responds to the perception that became so predominant in the 1950s and after in readings of Stowe that Tom is overly passive (especially as Black Power emerged in the 1960s). Classics Illustrated’s response is to portray Tom in the style of, and to some extent with the attributes of, a comic-book style super-hero:
This motif is carried forward into the comic book itself — particularly strikingly, on the title page:


Despite being in chains, Tom here assumes a heroic pose. This page also features the words from the Declaration of Independence that contradicted so blatantly the continuation of slavery in the US after the end of the War of Independence: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident … that all men are created equal … with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty … yet slavery grew and flourished in the new-born America’.

Within the cartoon strip itself, the comic is at pains to show a human and friendly relation between Tom and Eva, reciprocally — in what is clearly an attempt to exclude from the interaction the etiolated, saint-like connotations so present in Stowe’s depiction and so often reinforced by previous illustrators:
What has, we hope, clearly emerged is how, over the decades, the illustrations to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* play an important part in framing (paratextually) the way in which the story could be read, whilst also providing some indications of what the predominant expectations were in any period concerning how the text should be read. In particular, we hope it has become apparent how, repeatedly, the negative and racist (or, at least, near-racist) dimensions of the text can be picked up by and — we want to stress — *accentuated* by the illustrators. It can be proposed, then, that one way in which African Americans have come to form such a negative impression of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, despite the active resistance offered by George and Eliza Harris and the way in which Tom does not bend to Legree, betray Cassy or agree to flog Lucy (to name but a few of the ways in which the novel sustains a portrait of African Americans assuming some effective agency in their fight against slavery) is through the impact of the illustrations, which rarely allow such a dimension to emerge (with the plausible exception of the flight of Eliza across the Ohio river — though the main motivation that the pictures depict is a desperate, and at times almost animalistic attempt to save her child).

In this respect, we might also want to refer to how much of the paraphernalia and ephemera produced around *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* — be they Staffordshire flat-back figurines or adaptations for the stage — often reinforced the negative messages of the illustrations and so further accentuated the racism in the text.
This Staffordshire flatback figure dates from the mid 1850s and once again shows how early a sentimentalized and stereotypical representation of Uncle Tom came to the fore – here note how his eyes are looking up to the face of Little Eva, raised above and supported by him. Indeed it can be sensibly argued that the reception of Uncle Tom was shaped by such by-products of the text, combined with its illustrations, more than the text itself. For example, many people would have first encountered the text not by way of reading the book but by way of theatrical performances of a wide variety of texts loosely based on the text, or based on anti-Uncle Tom’s Cabins, like *The Sword and the Distaff: Or, “Fair, Fat, and Forty.” A Story of the South, at the Close of the Revolution*, by William Gilmore Simms (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co. 1852), *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is*, by Mary Henderson Eastman (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co, 1852), and *Uncle Robin in his Cabin in Virginia and Tom Without One in Boston* by J. Page (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1853) – each of these offering sustained Southern proslavery attacks, citing Stowe in order to rebut her arguments. So, we must take note of the heavily sentimentalized *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly. A Domestic Drama in Six Acts*. Dramatized by George L. Aiken (New York: Samuel French, 1853), which ran into many editions and with many revisions, and was produced throughout the nineteenth century:
Handbill for Aiken’s dramatized version of Uncle Tom’s Cabin (n.d.)

And, indeed, we must note *Uncle Tom; or, Life Among the Lowly* by H. J. Conway (Boston: unpublished manuscript, c. 1852). But we also need to add that in the South burlesques were also underlining the proslavery propaganda message that escaping “Toms” always suffered in the North, compared to those slaves staying contentedly in the South.

Such drama productions remained an important way in which the text was circulated after the Civil War – with Aiken’s version remaining very popular – right on into the twentieth century.
Obverse of 1881 handbill, “Rial and Draper’s Ideal Uncle Tom’s Cabin”.

Indeed Mr and Mrs Jay Rial made a living from touring their production, “Rial and Draper’s Ideal [or Mammoth] Uncle Tom’s Cabin”.

Reverse of 1881 handbill, “Rial and Draper’s Ideal Uncle Tom’s Cabin”.
This production was again highly sentimentalized, and also featured bloodhounds on stage, picking up on an idea introduced by H. J. Conway (who used barking dogs off stage) and actually featuring live bloodhounds onstage, in pursuit of Liza and her baby:

These sorts of encounters with a version of Uncle Tom deeply indebted to blackface and minstrel traditions would have been far more effective at alienating African Americans than the text of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, far from perfect though this be. Thus, as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has become ever more ‘a hissing and a byword’ over the years (J. C. Furnas, *Goodbye to Uncle Tom*, 1956), to a significant degree the packaging of the text in its illustrations its paraphernalia and its interpretations have promoted this rejection. Our argument then is that, if the reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is to be understood at all, then full attention needs to be paid to the history of its illustrations (and to the other visual productions of *Uncle Tom*).

We might agree with Alice’s observation in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, as she looks over her older sister’s shoulder at the book she is reading: “what is the use of a book,” thought Alice “without pictures or conversation?” (Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1866, p. 1). But we would add a supplement to her words: books can use pictures but pictures can also use books — to an alarming extent.
Harriet Beecher Stowe

Born a slave in 1789 in Charles County, Maryland, Josiah Henson escaped to Canada aged 41. In Canada, he helped other escaped slaves. Harriet Beecher Stowe read his autobiography, *The Life of Josiah Henson*, which had first been published in 1849. Josiah Henson is one possible inspiration for the character of Uncle Tom. Noteworthily, in this respect, in her 1853 *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to validate her depiction of Tom as a Christian hero, Stowe quoted several passages from Josiah Henson’s 1849 narrative of his slave experiences and his escape. In 1858 Stowe wrote a preface to Henson’s revised and expanded autobiography, *Father Henson’s Story of His Own Life*. After the Civil War, Henson, along with his supporters, emphasized these links with Stowe further, in order to advance the claim that Stowe had based Uncle Tom on Henson’s character and the stories he told of slavery: ‘the life of the Rev. Josiah Henson suggested to Mrs. Stowe the conception of her “Immortal hero,”’ wrote John Lobb (p.6), when justifying the title of what was to be the third edition of Henson’s book. This 1877 edition was entitled *An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson (Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom”)* in an overt attempt to asset the identicality of Henson and Uncle Tom. This third edition, from which the portrait of Stowe featured here is taken, was very extensively printed. It was the final edition printed during Henson’s lifetime. On the basis of his claim to be the original for Uncle Tom, Henson developed a career in public speaking in the Northern (slave-free) States in the USA and in England. After the first half of his book’s account of his experiences in slavery and his escape, the second half of Henson’s narrative offers a (perhaps more) interesting account of his life in freedom. Though Stowe wrote an introduction to endorse the 1858 edition of Henson’s autobiography, she never conceded that Henson’s story formed any part of her novel (despite quoting from it in the *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*).

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A companion study to this piece, which was published whilst the exhibition was mounted, is: Jo-Ann Morgan, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin as Visual Culture*, University of Missouri Press, 2007.