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Uncle Tom's Cabin in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*: An Analysis of Reception†

More than any other American novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) presses its critical commentators to take account of its popular reception and cultural influence. Considerations of reception and influence have been especially pronounced among critics addressing Stowe's representations of race. In perhaps the most scathing indictment extant of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, J. C. Furnas, a white critic, blames Stowe for "the wrongheadness, distortions and wishful thinkings about Negroes in general and American Negroes in particular that still plague us today."[1] Although some of the more spirited defenses of Stowe's racial politics, black characterizations, and overall influence on the culture have come from African American critics,[2] the fact remains that numerous other African Americans have been troubled by the cultural consequences of Stowe's sentimentalism and racialism. Donald Chaput is one of many who lament the "irreparable harm" done by Stowe's portrayal of Tom's Christian resignation; and Addison Gayle Jr. argues that the stereotypical portrayal of Tom and other slaves simply reinforced Southern views of black inferiority and submissiveness.[3] More recently,

end . . . which Jesus Christ came into this world to secure," in exactly the same way that the Puritans believed their mission was to found the "American city of God," and that Christians believe the New Testament to be a fulfillment of the old. Revolutionary ideologies typically announce themselves as the fulfillment of old promises or as a return to a golden age. What I am suggesting here, in short, is that the argument over whether the sentimental novelists were radical or conservative is a false issue. The real problem is how we, in the light of everything that has happened since they wrote, can understand and appreciate their work. Mary Kelley, "The Sentimentalists: Promise and Betrayal in the Home," *Signs* 4 (Spring 1979): 434–46; Alexander Cowie, "The Vogue of the Domestic Novel, 1850–1870," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 41 (October 1942): 420; Welter, "Cult of True Womanhood," pp. 151–74; Helen Waite Papashvily, *All the Happy Endings: A Study of the Domestic Novel in America, the Women Who Wrote It, the Women Who Read It, in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956); Dee Garrison, "Immoral Fiction in the Late Victorian Library," *American Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1976): 71–80.

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1. J. C. Furnas, *Goodbye to Uncle Tom* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1956), 8.
2. See, for example, Benjamin Hudson, "Another View of 'Uncle Tom,'" *Phylon* 24 (1963): 79–87; and Ernest Cassara, "The Rehabilitation of Uncle Tom: Significant Themes in Mrs. Stowe's Antislavery Novel," *CLA Journal* 17 (1973): 230–40. For a defense of Stowe's racial politics, see also Thomas Graham, "Harriet Beecher Stowe and the Question of Race," *New England Quarterly* 46 (1973): 614–22.
3. Donald Chaput, "Uncle Tom and Predestination," *Negro History Bulletin* 27 (1964): 143; Addison Gayle Jr., *The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1975), 6. Surely the most influential attack on the novel by an African American writer is James Baldwin's "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949),

Richard Yarborough criticizes Stowe for her use of racial stereotypes, for her unwillingness to grant to Uncle Tom a "sense of racial solidarity," and for her "tragic failure of imagination [which] prevented her from envisioning blacks (free or slave, mulatto or full-blood) as viable members of American society." The "failure" is "tragic" because so influential: "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the epicenter of a massive cultural phenomenon, the tremors of which still affect the relationship of blacks and whites in the United States."[4]

I call attention to the ways in which evaluations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are tied to the critic's sense of the novel's cultural reception and influence in order to suggest that an important index of the novel's relative success or failure, particularly when it is viewed (as we inevitably view it) in a social-historical context, should be its reception by those who had the most at stake in its reformatory social program: the free and enslaved blacks of the 1850s. For this reason, I think we need to take more seriously than we usually do the published record of the responses of literate free Northern blacks, who, outraged and despairing over the adoption of the Compromise of 1850's Fugitive Slave Law, regarded *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as Yarborough puts it, "as a godsend destined to mobilize white sentiment against slavery just when resistance to the southern forces was urgently needed."[5] My focus in this essay will be on the reception of Stowe's novel in the pages of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, principally between 1852 and 1854, a reception that paid particular attention to the question of the novel's influence on the culture, and a reception that in its complexities and debates should help critics of the 1990s to historicize their own reception of the novel in a larger and longer perspective.

A few prefatory words about *Frederick Douglass' Paper* and Douglass's cultural situation in the 1850s: As is well known, following the publication of his *Narrative* (1845) Douglass emerged as the most visible and respected black abolitionist of the time. Confident of his intellectual abilities as an opponent of slavery, he became increasingly troubled by the efforts of Garrison and others of the American Anti-Slavery Society—for whom he was a paid agent—to

which excoriates Stowe for her "self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality" (rpt. in *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons [Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980], 92) [see above, pp. 532–39—*Editor*]. Interestingly, Langston Hughes wrote a praising introduction to a 1952 edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, rpt. in *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 102–04.

4. Richard Yarborough, "Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel," in *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 54, 65, 46. On the post-1941 reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by African American critics, see Thomas F. Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1985), 388–96.
5. "Strategies of Black Characterization," 68.

limit his lectures to just the facts of slavery, and not analysis. A symbolic break with Garrison occurred in 1847 when following Douglass's British tour of 1845–47, he used funds from English supporters to found the *North Star*, an antislavery newspaper perceived by Garrison as in direct competition with his own *The Liberator*. Published in Rochester, New York, on a weekly basis, with Martin Delany working as co-editor for most of its first year, Douglass's paper quickly became "the most important black abolitionist newspaper in the country."[6] In 1851, the year *Uncle Tom's Cabin* began to appear in the *National Era*, Douglass broke openly with Garrison, as he came to believe, contra Garrison, that the most effective way to combat the Fugitive Slave Law and slavery generally was to champion political activism over moral suasion, an antislavery reading of the Constitution over a proslavery reading, and Unionism over dissolution. Attracted to Gerrit Smith's Liberty Party politics and his considerable financial resources, Douglass merged the *North Star* with Smith's *Liberty Party Paper* and changed its name to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, which he continued to publish up to 1860. Despite the fact that much of the four-page newspaper was devoted to reprinting antislavery speeches from Congress, the proceedings of numerous black, abolitionist, and women's conventions, and antislavery news from a wide range of newspapers and journals, the paper, as Benjamin Quarles notes (and as its name unambiguously indicates), "was to an unusual degree the product of one man's thinking."[7] The strong personal stamp that Douglass put on the paper should be kept in mind when we turn to the various articles on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that he began to publish. These articles, I will be arguing, reveal Douglass as a creatively appropriative reader of Stowe's novel. Though many of the articles were reprinted from other sources, Douglass had an enormous amount of material to choose from; his selection process needs to be considered as a central part of his efforts to shape a particular way of reading the novel.[8]

The first mention of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, however, was an in-house review of 8 April 1852, which may have been written by Douglass

6. Eric J. Sundquist, "Introduction," *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 10.
7. Benjamin Quarles, *Frederick Douglass* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, Inc., 1948), 83. On Douglass's newspapers, see pp. 80–98. Also useful is Shelly Fisher Fishkin and Carla L. Peterson, "'We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident': The Rhetoric of Frederick Douglass's Journalism," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, 166–88. On Douglass and Smith, see John R. McKivigan, "The Frederick Douglass-Gerrit Smith Friendship and Political Abolitionism in the 1850s," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, 205–32. The most reliable biography is William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), though McFeely has little to say about Douglass's interactions with black writers and intellectuals—such as Martin Delany—during the 1850s.
8. See the two articles reprinted above, p. 499, and p. 502 [*Editor*].

but more likely was the work of his English comrade, financial supporter, and managing editor, Julia Griffiths, who wrote most of the reviews appearing in the weekly "Literary Notices" section. Because the review is an important one and not widely available, I quote it in its entirety:

> 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 installments, 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 chief 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 favor 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 Line."[9]

This initial review, of course, is not a review of the book proper, but of the serialized novel, which, despite the reviewer's assertion of the book's social impact, had a relatively limited audience in the *National Era*. The rapid sale of five thousand copies of the published book would hardly have indicated the full extent of its eventual popularity and influence. Still, the moral and aesthetic evaluation of the "truly great work" is very much tied to the reviewer's sense of its social function: Stowe's descriptive powers, realism, fine characterizations, and "argumentation," we are told, cannot but "enlist the kindly sympathies, of numbers" to the antislavery cause. Sympathy is a key concept here—Stowe in her Preface announced that she

9. *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 8 April 1852, 2, hereafter abbreviated as *FDP*.

wanted "to awaken sympathy and feeling"[1] for the slave—and it should be emphasized that Douglass, as his *Narrative* and subsequent remarks on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reveal, thought that the ability of the writer to create in the (white) reader a sympathetic identification with the plight of the slave was central to a text's potential to bring about social change. Perceiving the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be potentially decisive to the antislavery cause, Douglass, by the printing and/or authoring of this review, conveys his belief that Stowe deserves "a large debt of gratitude" from the "friends of freedom," be those readers (so it is implied) white or black. "Cultural work," to use Jane Tompkins's helpful term,[2] is what the reviewer perceives Stowe's novel to be performing, a subversive and revolutionary sort of work in that it encourages readers to honor a *"Higher Law"* than that of the Federal Government.

Whether or not Douglass authored the review, the values celebrated therein—sympathy, realism, social influence—will continue to be celebrated in *Frederick Douglass' Paper.* In part, the willingness of Douglass to embrace the novel uncritically owes much to his commitment to Enlightenment ideals of egalitarianism and universalism. As Waldo E. Martin Jr. remarks, for Douglass "the liberating spirit of humanism ideally subsumed and eventually overrode the stifling spirit of race."[3] Despite that commitment, the next two mentions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* addressed matters of racial politics and difference. In a letter printed six weeks after the initial review, William G. Allen, who identifies himself as "a free black teacher," praises Stowe's "wonder of wonders" of a novel, but then challenges the idealization of Tom's Christic heroism. "[I]f any man had too much piety," he remarks, "Uncle Tom was that man." Failing to note that Tom in fact did resist Legree by refusing his order to flog the slave Lucy, Allen, perhaps with Douglass's own account of his resistance to Covey in the back of his mind, declares that "there should be resistance to tyrants, if it need be, to the death."[4]

Approximately one month after the appearance of Allen's letter, Douglass printed a column on the reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in New York City. The piece, signed "Ethiop" and authored by William J. Wilson, one of Douglass's regular contributing editors,

1. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly,* ed. Kenneth S. Lynn (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), 1.
2. See Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), xi–xix. [See above, pp. 539–61 —*Editor.*]
3. Waldo E. Martin Jr., *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984), 96.
4. *FDP,* 20 May 1852, 3. Similar hesitations about Tom's passivity would be voiced two more times in *FDP;* see the issues of 17 June 1853, 1; and 22 December 1854, 3.

expresses amazement at the extraordinary impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on a city "hitherto so faced over with the adamant of pro-slavery politics, unionism, churchism, and every other shade of *'ism'* hammered out, and welded on by his *satanic majesty* and faithful subjects, for the last half century, that it completely staggers belief and puts credulity at fault." But that impact, Wilson warns, threatens to become less transformative than narrowly commercial. Where once were "exhibited in their windows Zip Coon, or Jim Crow . . . shopkeepers are now proud to illume these very windows through the windows of my *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*" In short, stocking Stowe's novel makes for good business, which Wilson can only hope speaks to "something in the heart of this community deeper rooted than the teachings of *politicians, demagogues,* and *robed priests.*" Wilson's cynical sense of the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* phenomenon as a white phenomenon—a white author appropriated by white businessmen for white consumers—leads him to wish that it had been a black who had written the first acclaimed antislavery novel, for he fears that black antislavery novelists inevitably will be subsumed by the (marketplace) tradition headed by Stowe. He explains in his concluding cautionary paragraph on the literature of antislavery: "it may yet be regretted should its march be in an invented [*sic*] order; the blacks (who by position ought to be the more faithful delineators of oppression, and the keennest searchers after justice, that she fully does her office-work) being found in the *REAR* instead of being found not merely in the FRONT RANK, but in the VERY LEAD."[5]

Ultimately, Wilson begs a very important question: Can a white writer do "faithful" justice to the black experience of slavery? The question would not be raised explicitly in the pages of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* for nearly a year, and then with a vengeance in an epistolary debate between Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany. Instead, there emerge two large motifs in the articles on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* printed by Douglass: the unprecedented impact of the novel, not only on readers "north of 'Mason and Dixon's Line,'" but in the South and across the Atlantic as well; and a concomitant near-hagiographic celebration and defense of Stowe's moral and literary virtues.

A front-page article in an issue of August 1852, reprinted from the New York *Evening Post,* is the first of many testimonials to the moral influence and representational authority of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* "I am a slaveholder myself," writes a New Orleans citizen who was

5. "From Our Brooklyn Correspondent," *FDP,* 17 June 1852, 3. Though "inverted order" was probably meant over "invented order," the typo speaks in interesting ways to the constructedness of an antislavery canon.

given Stowe's novel by a family friend. "I now wish to bear my testimony to its just delineation of the position the slave occupies." A like-minded letter, reprinted from the New York *Independent*, appeared in an issue of October 1852. Again, the correspondent is a New Orleans citizen, who, unlike the first correspondent, questions Stowe's realism. "My own view is," he declares, "that Mrs. Stowe has presented the institution of slavery in too favorable a light." This tongue-in-cheek criticism aside, the writer, perhaps picking up on Stowe's own ideals of influence as expressed in the novel's final chapter, places special emphasis on the transformative power of the novel: "No book can be made to take the place of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. People will read it, and as its keys are touched, conscience and the heart will give forth sweetly responsive notes."[6]

Though Douglass would have distrusted such rosy language, he no doubt wanted to believe that the novel could mobilize enough people, North and South, to influence Americans to abolish slavery. As Douglass assessed the situation, influence would come from within and without; thus he printed numerous articles on the marshaling power of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* overseas. The issue of 8 October 1852, for example, reprinted as its lead article the review in *Frazer's Magazine*, which spoke of how the novel's realistic portrayal of slavery "horrifies and haunts."[7] Two months later Douglass reprinted the Earl of Carlisle's Introduction to the English edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel which, so the Earl claims, marks "a kind of epoch in the literary, as well as, I trust, in themoral history of the time."[8] With an article printed in that same December issue, on a meeting of the Glasgow Emancipation Society to "testify to our gratitude and approbation under providence to Harriet Beecher Stowe, the authoress of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,'"[9] Douglass initiated his practice of reprinting formal testimonials from British antislavery groups. Two articles on the front page of a March 1853 issue, discussing the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Paris and Moscow, enlarged the sphere of Stowe's influence. As Douglass would

6. *FDP*, 13 August 1852, 1; and 22 October 1852, 4.
7. *FDP*, 8 October 1852, 1. The following week Douglass reprinted the London *Examiner's* glittering review; see *FDP*, 15 October 1852, 1.
8. *FDP*, 24 December 1852, 2. Both the reviewer for *Frazer's* and the Earl of Carlisle broached one relatively minor criticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin:* that it appeared to endorse the view that chattel slavery and "wage slavery" were moral equivalents. For English readers of the upper classes, such a suggestion was an affront to their sense of the organic coherence of English society.
9. *FDP*, 24 December 1852, 1. The novelist William Wells Brown was reported as having attended that meeting. For similar testimonials from British antislavery groups, see, for example, the "Address to Mrs. Stowe" from an antislavery group based in Belfast, Ireland, in *FDP*, 21 January 1853, 2; and "Testimonial to Mrs. Stowe," in *FDP*, 12 August 1853, 1. On the influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in England, see also "'Uncle Tom's Cabin' in England," *FDP*, 17 December 1852, 1; Douglass's speech, "A Nation in the Midst of a Nation," in *FDP*, 27 May 1853, 1; and William Wells Brown's report in *FDP*, 26 August 1853, 2.

remark editorially after reprinting yet another such article: "Uncle Tom has his mission in Europe, and most conscientiously is he fulfilling it."[1]

Convinced both of the social uses of the novel and of Stowe's humanitarianism, Douglass, in addition to printing articles on the novel's cultural influence, also sprinkled the pages of his paper with treacly *Uncle Tom's Cabin* poems and worshipful profiles of Stowe.[2] Additionally, as flameholder for the cause, Douglass took it upon himself to defend Stowe from all who might challenge or smear her reputation. Thus he found the space to print two reviews of W. L. G. Smith's *Life at the South; or, Uncle Tom's Cabin as It Is* (1852), among other novelistic proslavery "responses" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As he (or Julia Griffiths) comments on Smith's effort: "To enter the lists in competition with Mrs. Stowe and be defeated, is no disgrace; but . . . we really feel it is a disparagement of the genius of the accomplished authoress before named, to connect, in any way, the mention of her almost perfect work with the trash before us."[3]

Douglass's most significant effort to counter criticism of Stowe's novel from a "respectable" source, prior to his debate with Martin Delany, occurred over two issues in early 1853. In response to an attack on Stowe by George R. Graham in the February 1853 *Graham's Magazine*, Douglass remarks in his "Literary Notices" section that he has "perused" the piece, entitled "Black Letters; or Uncle Tom-Foolery in Literature," "with attention, regret, and (we would add) disgust. It is the most unjust, the most ungenerous and the least refined review of the world-renowned book we have ever read." And it is a review, Douglass makes clear, that is thoroughly informed by racism: "'*[W]e hate this niggerism*,'" Douglass asserts, is Graham's

1. *FDP*, 11 March 1853, 1; and 13 May 1853, 3. The following year Douglass reprinted an article from the New York *Tribune*, which declared: "Our most prominent and extraordinary representative abroad is really Uncle Tom.—His influence is in permanent evidence at Paris" (*FDP*, 17 November 1854, 3).
2. Here is a sample stanza from Mary H. Collier's "Eva's Parting":

> And father, when I'm sleeping,
> In my quiet grave so green,
> And my soul the Lord is keeping
> In the world of bliss unseen;
> You will give the boon of Freedom
> To the old and faithful friend,
> Who has borne me on his bosom,
> Where the white magnolias bend.

See *FDP*, 13 August 1852, 4. For another example, see A. N. Cole's "Lines to the Lowly, Written upon Reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *FDP*, 10 September 1852, 4. The most hagiographic of the profiles, "Some Account of Mrs. Beecher Stowe's Family, By an Alabama Man," from *Frazer's Magazine*, proclaims that "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the agonizing cry of feelings pent up for years in the heart of a true woman" (*FDP*, 17 December 1852, 1).
3. *FDP*, 13 August 1852, 2. For examples of other reviews of similar such novels, see *FDP*, 15 October 1852, 1; and 21 January 1853, 4.

"solution of the whole matter."[4] Evidently content that Graham damns himself with his own words, that his vituperations "will be greeted as THEY DESERVE TO BE," Douglass, in a front page article of March 1853, reprints the entirety of Graham's angry rejoinder to several of his critics, which has this to say about Douglass:

> Mr. Fred. Douglass has read our article 'with disgust,' and says it may be accounted for thus: *'we hate niggerism!'* He is mistaken. We have taught blacks in a Sunday-school for years, as a duty. We rather like Fred. himself—and so far as by study, industry, and an honest life he sets an example moral and intellectual to his race—we respect him; but we hate the present negro literature—especially that of Fred.'s, which by abusing the white, is intended to elevate the black man.[5]

Patronizing as they are, Graham's comments on Douglass touch upon a crucial issue of the time, particularly for Northern black abolitionists: how to "elevate the black man." For it was believed by many blacks that as long as the free blacks were poor, intemperate, and lawless, whites would fail to mobilize around the abolitionist cause. Thus a large aim of the black convention movement and newspapers of the period was to build self-confidence and a sense of community among the free blacks, not only for the sake of the free blacks but also of the slaves. As Douglass declared in a January 1854 issue of his paper, *"the free colored man's elevation is essential to the* slave *colored man's emancipation."*[6] Though he occasionally argued for black elevation as if white racism were an unrelated issue—that individual will alone could help blacks to succeed—it was much more often the case that he presented black self-help programs in the North as part of an antiracist struggle intimately related to, if not a necessary condition of, the struggle against racism and slavery in the South.

Given Stowe's emphasis in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the need to educate America's blacks, Douglass could not help regarding her as a fellow believer in the importance of black elevation. His conviction of their shared vision was only underscored when in March

4. *FDP*, 21 January 1853, 3.
5. "Graham vs. Uncle Tom," *FDP*, 4 March 1853, 1.
6. *FDP*, 2 January 1854, 1. On Douglass and black self-help, see August Meier, "Frederick Douglass' Vision for America: A Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Negro Protest" (1967), rpt. in *Frederick Douglass*, ed. Benjamin Quarles (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 143–64. See also Douglass's Franklinian lecture, "Self-Help" (1849), in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John Blassingame (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), 2:167–70; and Rafia Zafir, "Franklinian Douglass: The Afro-American as Representative Man," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, 141–65. The seminal study of black self-elevation is Frederick Cooper, "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827–50," *American Quarterly* 24 (1972): 604–25.

1853 she invited him to her home in Andover, Massachusetts, in order to sound him out on how best she could help America's free blacks. This was not the first time Stowe had requested information from Douglass. Two years earlier, as she was planning the Legree sections of the novel, she had written him in the hope that he or an acquaintance could supply her with first-hand information on the workings of a cotton plantation. In the same letter, after praising his newspaper, she declares her intention to "modify" his views on "two subjects,—the church and African colonization,"[7] though she focuses mainly on defending the church (and hence her family) from the charge of being proslavery. There is no evidence that Douglass responded to or even received the letter, but his decision in late 1852 to reprint three articles on Stowe's controversy with the Presbyterian clergyman Dr. Joel Parker—wherein Henry Ward Beecher, Calvin Stowe, and Harriet Stowe herself challenged Parker's public accusation that a reference in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to his putative proslavery views was libelous—may well have been an ironic rejoinder to her defense of the church and churchmen.[8] More pertinently, the reprintings would have spoken to his camaraderie with Stowe the novelist on the issue of church complicity in slavery, an author-reader camaraderie that would develop into a tentative friendship following his March visit.

Douglass's articles in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* on the visit to Stowe and its aftermath can be taken as a further effort to set forth a social-transformative reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In an article of March 1853 titled "A Day and a Night in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,'" Douglass assures his readers that his visit to Stowe will eventually benefit the free blacks. He discloses the specifics one month later in an article on Stowe's departure for England: "The chief good which we anticipate from Mrs. Stowe's mission, is the founding of an INSTITUTION, in which our oppressed and proscribed youth, MALE and FEMALE, may obtain a plain English education, and a practical knowledge of various useful TRADES." Douglass believed that such an institution, by teaching free blacks the industrial and mechanical skills currently denied them by racist apprenticing practices, would allow blacks to lessen their dependency on merely servile occupations. Confident that Stowe shared his goals on this project—that she would in fact turn over funds to Douglass so that he could establish just such an institution in his hometown of Rochester—Douglass devoted numerous columns to her six-month's

7. Letter of 9 June 1851, in *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. Annie Fields (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1897), 134.
8. On Stowe and Parker, see the following issues of *FDP*: 29 October 1852, 3; 5 November 1852, 1; and 12 November 1852, 1. Parker objected to the remarks on his preaching in chapter twelve of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

visit to Great Britain, repeatedly reminding his readers of its principal purpose: "the establishment of some institution, which shall be of *efficient* and *permanent* benefit to the colored people of the United States."[9]

Seeking to gain additional support for the institution, Douglass in July of 1853 presented to participants of the Colored National Convention at Rochester, a number of whom were opposed to such an expensive and segregated school, a March 1853 letter he had written to Stowe detailing the benefits of his industrial college plan; he printed the letter in a December issue of his newspaper. The December publication would suggest that Douglass was beginning to despair of obtaining funds from Stowe, who had returned to America several months earlier and had not yet offered him a major contribution. In the letter he asserts that Stowe's authorship of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "alone, involves us in a debt of gratitude which cannot be measured." But he calls on her to go one step further, to do what the novel urges its white readers to do: educate the blacks. Stowe herself, he asserts, can now help Douglass to eradicate the "disease" afflicting his people—"POVERTY, IGNORANCE AND DEGRADATION"—by contributing to the construction of an industrial college, which should help them both to achieve their mutual desire: the end of slavery. As Douglass explains, "The most telling, the most killing refutation of slavery, is the presentation of an industrious, enterprising, thrifty, and intelligent free black population. Such a population I believe would rise in the Northern States under the fostering care of such a college as that proposed."[1]

But should blacks place themselves under the "fostering care" of a white philanthropist, particularly one who in her novel appears to be advocating not black elevation but rather emigration under the aegis of a colonization society? That was one of the large concerns troubling Martin Delany, whose resentment of Douglass for failing to review *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852)—perhaps the most significant black nationalist text of the nineteenth century—underlies a series of angry letters to Douglass, which Douglass printed, along with his rejoinders, in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* during April and May 1853. Of course Douglass could have chosen to ignore Delany's letters, just as he had chosen to ignore his book. The fact that Douglass published them suggests he was aware that Delany raised issues of fundamental importance.[2] And as Douglass waited for Stowe to provide the funding he so desired, he may well have shared

9. *FDP*, 4 March 1853, 1; 15 April 1853, 2; and 6 May 1853, 2.
1. *FDP*, 2 December 1853, 2.
2. On the importance of Douglass's debate with Delany, see also Yarborough, "Strategies of Black Characterization," 71–72.

some of the suspicions voiced so vociferously by Delany. Printing Delany's letters allowed Douglass to convey through Delany any doubts he might have had about his response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its author, while at the same time putting those doubts, at least on the pages of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, to rest.

Delany's first letter appeared approximately one month after Douglass's meeting with Stowe. In it, Delany addresses the crucial question of how the free blacks should go about the task of improving their lot in America. In *The Condition . . . of the Colored People of the United States*, Delany stated unequivocally: "Our elevation must be the result of *self-efforts*, and the work of our *own hands*."[3] His letter to Douglass reasserts this dictum, as he worries over blacks' (especially Douglass's) tendencies to depend on whites for their elevation: "Now I simply wish to say, that we have always fallen into great errors in efforts of this kind, giving to others than the *intelligent* and *experienced* among *ourselves;* and in all due respect and difference [*sic*] to Mrs. Stowe, I beg leave to say that she *knows nothing about us*, 'the Free Colored people of the United States,' neither does any other white person—and, consequently, can contrive no successful scheme for our elevation; it must be done for ourselves."[4]

In his prior and subsequent writings, Douglass came close to agreeing with Delany on this point. "We must rise or fall, succeed or fail, by our own merits," he had declared in 1848. In the first published version of his famous "Self-Help" lecture (1849), he again had allowed whites only a limited role in blacks' efforts at self-improvement, asserting that though "[o]ur white friends may do much for us," a large fact remains: "Equality and respectability can only be attained by our own exertions." And in an 1855 article in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* calling on expatriated blacks to return to the United States, Douglass would proclaim as a central truth: "THAT OUR ELEVATION AS A RACE, IS ALMOST WHOLLY DEPENDENT UPON OUR OWN EXERTIONS."[5] That "ALMOST," of course, signals the key difference between Douglass and Delany, since Douglass, especially during the 1850s when political developments seemed so grim, was willing to take help wherever he could find it. Moreover, unlike Delany, he was not so sanguine about the existence of a cohesive black community that could elevate itself on its own. Thus he writes in response to Delany: "To scornfully reject

3. Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852; rpt., New York: Arno Press, 1968), 45.
4. *FDP*, 1 April 1853, 2. Is Delany punning on "deference"? Or did Douglass perhaps allow this typo in order to underscore Delany's *difference* from Stowe?
5. Frederick Douglass, "WHAT ARE THE COLORED PEOPLE DOING FOR THEMSELVES?" *The North Star*, 14 July 1848, 1; *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 2:169; "Self-Elevation—Rev. S. R. Ward," *FDP*, 13 April 1855, 1.

all aid from our white friends, and to denounce them as unworthy of our confidence, looks high and mighty enough on paper; but unless the background is filled up with facts demonstrating our independence and self-sustaining power, of what use is such display of self-consequence?" As for Delany's doubts on Stowe's sympathies for black people, Douglass testily remarks: "The assertion that Mrs. Stowe 'knows nothing about us,' shows that Bro. DELANY knows nothing about Mrs. Stowe."[6]

Four weeks later Douglass printed three Stowe-related items in his paper: an article from *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* on Stowe's visit to the Duchess of Sutherland, a glowing review (most likely by Douglass or Griffiths) of Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and a cantankerous, actually rather humorous, letter from Delany insisting that if Josiah Henson is "the real *Uncle Tom*," then he should be granted a "portion of the profits." Perhaps even Douglass himself, Delany adds, should be granted profits, for "I am of the opinion, that Mrs. Stowe has draughted largely on all the best fugitive slave narratives . . . but of this I am not competent to judge, not having as yet *read* 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' my *wife* having *told* me the most I know about it."[7]

Delany's joking mood goes into retreat, however, in his next letter, printed the following week, which raises perhaps the most troubling issue of all for black readers of the time (and beyond): Stowe's apparent advocacy, in the final chapters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, of colonizationism. In fact, Delany's letter marks only the third time the colonization issue is broached in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*,[8] which is surprising given that Douglass was an outspoken opponent of colonization projects, whether they be white racist attempts to ship blacks to Liberia or black nationalist calls for African or Haitian emigration. (His hostility to colonizationism may help to explain his unwillingness to review Delany's *The Condition . . . of the Colored People*, which had called for black emigration to Central and South America and the West Indies.) Delany, in his letter on Stowe's colonizationist stance, somewhat coyly begins by stating that in his earlier letter he was being "ironical" when he claimed that whites know nothing of blacks. What he meant was "that they know nothing, comparatively, about us." Having settled that score, he moves

6. *FDP*, 1 April 1853, 2.
7. *FDP*, 29 April 1853, 3. The reviewer of *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* declares: "'Key' not only proves the correctness of every essential part of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' but proves more and worse things against the murderous system than are alleged in that great book" (2).
8. William G. Allen noted, in his aforementioned letter printed in the 20 May 1852 issue of *FDP*: "I have one regret, with regard to the book, and that is, that the chapter favoring colonization was ever written. I do not, however, apprehend so much harm from it, as some others seem to anticipate" (3). See also the letter of C. C. Foote, in *FDP*, 22 April 1853, 2.

to his central charge, which he makes with an ironic praising of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "is not Mrs. Stowe a *Colonizationist*? having so avowed, or at least subscribed to, and recommended their principles in her great work of Uncle Tom." Equally worthy of questioning and censure, from Delany's perspective, are Stowe's "sneers at Hayti—the only truly free and independent civilized black nation as such, or colored if you please, on the face of the earth."[9]

In his rebuttal to Delany's letter, Douglass points to contradictions in Delany's own colonizationist stance while purporting not to care about Stowe's: "He says *she* is a colonizationist; and we ask, what if she is?—names do not frighten us. A little while ago, brother Delany was a colonizationist. . . . Yet, we never suspected his friendliness to the colored people."[1] For Douglass the larger issue is precisely that of "friendliness," particularly as it translates into usefulness, and so he wants to keep faith with Stowe despite his disappointment with her sentiments on African colonization in the final chapters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In fact, he had broached the issue with her in his letter of 8 March 1853 (published, as mentioned earlier, in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in December of 1853) when he linked his plan for an industrial college to his abhorrence for colonizationism: "The truth is, dear madam, we are *here*, and we are likely to remain. Individuals emigrate—nations never. We have grown up with this republic, and I see nothing in her character, or even in the character of the American people as yet, which compels the belief that we must leave the United States."[2] What is appealing about Douglass's interactions with Stowe is his working assumption that he could influence a writer who herself is so influential—that he could play a shaping role in her thought and actions, and ultimately in the cultural reception and influence of her novel. In contrast, with Delany he remains censorious and dismissive. Terming Delany's letter "unfair, uncalled for," he announces. "We shall not . . . allow the sentiments put in the brief letter of GEORGE HARRIS, at the close of Uncle Tom's Cabin, to vitiate forever Mrs. Stowe's power to do us good. Who doubts that Mrs. Stowe is more of an abolitionist than when she wrote that chapter?"[3] And perhaps she *was* "more of an abolitionist," for that same month, stung by criticism from Douglass and other black readers, she sent a note to the New York meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society declaring, in

9. *FDP*, 6 May 1853, 3.
1. Ibid., 2. (Note that Douglass, aware of the incendiary nature of Delany's charges, places his response on the page before Delany's letter.) On the conservative nature of some black colonization projects, and in particular on the contradictions informing Delany's various colonization ventures, see Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978), esp. 27–45.
2. *FDP*, 2 December 1853, 2.
3. *FDP*, 6 May 1853, 2.

the paraphrased words of the proceedings, "that if she were to write 'Uncle Tom' again, she would not send George Harris to Liberia."[4]

The belief that whites have the power "to do us good"—a power, as Douglass understands it, very much dependent on the ability of blacks to put that "good" to use—centrally informs at least one other response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*: Douglass's novella "The Heroic Slave." Despite the fact that it was serialized in the paper several weeks prior to the Douglass-Delany debate, the novella can be read as a proleptic response to Delany as well. An account of the slave Madison Washington from 1835 until he led a successful revolt on the slave ship *Creole* in 1841, the historical novella revises *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by presenting the reader with a revolutionary slave who is "black, but comely."[5] Unlike Stowe, who bifurcates her blacks into "white-blooded" rebels and "black-blooded" docilities, Douglass merges the two character types in the person of Madison Washington. "A child might play in his arms, or dance on his shoulders. . . . His broad mouth and nose spoke only of good nature and kindness," Douglass writes of Washington's Tom-like attributes. And yet, like George Harris, "He had the head to conceive, and the hand to execute. In a word, he was one to be sought as a friend, but to be dreaded as an enemy" (103). But though Douglass's novella revises elements of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s characterizations, there are significant parallels between the two works: both make use of temperance themes, particularly in delineating the moral degeneracy of slave owners; both idealize the family; and both temper their portrayals of black violence.[6] Douglass tones down the violence of the slave rebellion by having the revolt on the *Creole* narrated by a white sailor, who not only remains passed out during most of it but also twice has his life saved from vengeful slaves by Washington's intervention. Unlike the revengeful Babo of Melville's "Benito Cereno" (1855), Washington simply desires the liberty of his people. Presenting him in this way, as several critics have pointed out, Douglass hopes to find a receptive

4. Cited in Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, 294.
5. "The Heroic Slave," rpt. in *Frederick Douglass: The Narrative and Selected Writings*, ed. Michael Meyer (New York: Modern Library, 1984), 303. The novella appeared in the 4, 11, 18, and 25 March issues of *FDP*; I use the more widely available reprinting. Subsequent parenthetical page references are to the Modern Library edition. On American Revolutionary ideology in the novella, see Eric J. Sundquist, "Frederick Douglass: Literacy and Paternalism," *Raritan* 6 (1986): 112. For background to the historical slave rebellion, see Howard Jones, "The Peculiar Institution and National Honor: The Case of the *Creole* Slave Revolt," *Civil War History* 21 (1975): 28–50.
6. See Robert B. Stepto, "Sharing the Thunder: The Literary Exchanges of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Bibb, and Frederick Douglass," in *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 135–53. The best close reading of Douglass's novella is Stepto, "Storytelling in Early Afro-American Fiction: Frederick Douglass' 'The Heroic Slave,'" *Georgia Review* 36 (1982): 355–68.

audience among those white readers who might otherwise be alienated by representations of black rage.[7]

These same contemporary white readers would probably also admire the portrayal of Listwell, the white Ohioan who, under the sway of Washington's opening soliloquy, embraces abolitionism and comes to play a key role in the novella. Five years after overhearing Washington speak in a Virginia forest of his desires for freedom, Listwell helps him board a steamer in Ohio bound for Canada. In a subsequent letter to Listwell, Washington addresses him thus: "My dear friend,—for such you truly are" (323). When Washington, after a failed effort to free his wife, is recaptured in Virginia and put on a slave ship headed for New Orleans, Listwell again seeks to offer his assistance. Washington exclaims to the slaves, who are startled by Listwell's friendly overtures: "We are all chained here together,—ours is a common lot; and that gentleman is not less *your* friend than *mine*" (332). Listwell's initial response to Washington's dire situation is to counsel him to become, in a sense, an Uncle Tom: "Put your trust in God, and bear your sad lot with the manly fortitude which becomes a man" (335). On second thought, however, Listwell decides to act: he purchases "three strong *files*" from a local hardware store and, as the slave ship departs, manages to slip them into Madison's pocket as he passes (337).

In a searching critique of the novella, Yarborough expresses his concerns about the prominent role played by Listwell. Compared to other accounts of the *Creole* revolt—by William Wells Brown, Lydia Maria Child, and Pauline Hopkins—Douglass places "the greatest emphasis upon the role played by whites in the protagonist's life." Perhaps, Yarborough suggests, the granting of near-heroic stature to Listwell "reflects [Douglass's] desire to reach and move white readers." But the end result is this: "he implies that even the most self-reliant and gifted black male slave needs white assistance."[8] The problem with Yarborough's reading is that it overgeneralizes and to some extent dehistoricizes. Douglass's point is surely not that in all moments of oppression—whether in the American 1840s or beyond and elsewhere—blacks need the assistance of whites, but rather that in Madison's particular situation—or in the blacks' particular situation in the American 1850s—there can exist a sympathetic response to suffering that crosses the lines of race. Additionally, and this seems to me the really crucial point, Douglass

7. See esp. William L. Andrews, "The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative," *PMLA* 105 (1990): 27–28; and Richard Yarborough, "Race, Violence, and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave,'" in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, 178–79. Yarborough is more critical of Douglass's rhetorical strategies than Andrews.
8. "Race, Violence, and Manhood," 178–79.

suggests that the white sympathy and assistance that help to produce the slaves' revolutionary action in no way compromises the self-reliance or heroism of such action, and in fact is the product of a black's influence on a white: it is Madison Washington's opening soliloquy, after all, that converts Listwell to the antislavery cause and makes him so useful to the slaves. Nevertheless, in his presentation of the slave revolt in the final section of the novella, Douglass stresses that the blacks act on their own. They are liberated not by Listwell, but as the result of "the triumphant leadership of their heroic chief and deliverer" (348).[9] Thus, although the novella revises Stowe's conception of black heroism by portraying an actively revolutionary hero with black skin, I would maintain that parallels between Douglass's and Stowe's discourse of sympathy and community outweigh the revisionary strain and that the large thrust of the novella is to counter the views of those, like Martin Delany, who were unwilling to grant that whites can genuinely sympathize with the plight of the slaves, those who would insist that white beneficence only further contributes to black docility and subordination.

For Douglass, the ability to sympathize was a key indication of one's humanity, and those whom he believed possessed capacities for sympathy—such as Stowe—were viewed as *nearly* transcending the limits of race (Douglass never closed his eyes to racial difference). Sympathy allows for the possibility of dialogue and influence; and I do not think it too farfetched to read "The Heroic Slave," in part, as an allegory of Douglass's relationship with Stowe, particularly if we take Listwell's overhearing of Washington's soliloquy and subsequent conversion to antislavery as analogous to Stowe's reading of Douglass's *Narrative* and eventual authoring of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In this model of influence, as I hypothesize it here between Douglass and Stowe, and as Douglass in "The Heroic Slave" presents it between Washington and Listwell, power is shared and mutually constitutive. From this perspective, Douglass, in his championing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, cannot be regarded (pace Delany) as a dupe or a lackey, for he himself had a role in the production of the novel and continued to play a significant role in its cultural reproduction.

Yet Douglass's specific plan to beget a black industrial college from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* failed to transpire. While Stowe, in a letter of December 1853 to William Garrison, could declare that Douglass's "plans for the elevation of his own race are manly, sensible,

9. I would agree with Yarborough that Douglass's emphasis on Washington's manly individualism is troubling. The other slaves seem to play but a small role in the rebellion, and women slaves, such as Washington's wife, disappear from the novella; see "Race, Violence, and Manhood," 176–77.

comprehensive,"[1] one month later Douglass announced in the pages of *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* in an article on his proposed industrial college, that "Mrs. Stowe, for reasons which she deems quite satisfactory, does not, at present, see fit to stand forth as the patron of the proposed institution."[2] For various reasons, Stowe lost interest in the project while in England, perhaps because she thought blacks could not successfully run their own school, or perhaps because she was aware of criticisms of the project from other blacks. "Thus cold-watered," Benjamin Quarles reports, "Mrs. Stowe's money-raising efforts realized the meagre sum of $535. This she turned over to Douglass for his personal use."[3] It would be tempting to assert that Douglass therefore became disillusioned with Stowe, but the evidence suggests that Douglass's relationship with her remained a cordial one, and that his admiration for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* remained undiminished. Between 27 January and 22 December of 1854, Douglass reprinted from the New York *Independent* a series of ten articles by Stowe, "Shadows on the Hebrew Mountains." That same year Stowe contributed, as she had in 1853, a piece for Julia Griffith's *Autographs for Freedom*, a fundraising volume for *Frederick Douglass' Paper.* The following year saw the publication of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, a text which elicited from Anna Adams, who reviewed it in Douglass's newspaper, the highest form of praise: she had "read nothing since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which so thrilled every fibre of the soul and awoke such intense sympathy for the slave."[4] As Douglass proclaimed in an 1857 speech reprinted in his paper: "the name of Harriet Beecher Stowe can never die while the love of freedom lives in the world."[5]

No doubt Douglass was distressed, after the Civil War, by Stowe's initial opposition to black suffrage, but that did not stop him from attending a party celebrating her seventy-first birthday in 1882. Nor did he seem to harbor any undue resentment in his retrospective remarks on Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892). His belief in the importance of the novel to the antislavery cause is consistent with his position of the 1850s: "In the midst of these fugitive slave troubles came the book known as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a work of marvelous depth and power. Nothing could have better suited the moral and humane requirements of the hour. Its effect was amazing, instantaneous, and universal." In his

1. Letter of 19 December 1853, rpt. in *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe,* 214. Stowe wrote the letter to defend Douglass against Garrison's charge that he was an "apostate" from the cause. She demanded of Garrison: "Is there but one true antislavery church and all others infidels? Who shall declare what it is?" (214–15).
2. "The Industrial College," *FDP,* 20 January 1854, 3.
3. *Frederick Douglass* (1948), 131.
4. *FDP,* 21 September 1855, 4.
5. "The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies," *FDP,* 7 August 1857, 1.

account of his meeting with Stowe in Andover, he remains convinced of her sympathies for the free and enslaved blacks: "There was no contradiction between the author and her book." Thus he defends her from proslavery smears that her British travels were meant only to make her rich: "I denounced their accusations as groundless and through the columns of my paper, assured the public that the testimonial then being raised in England by Mrs. Stowe would be sacredly devoted to the establishment of an industrial school for colored youth." As a result of his efforts, he maintains, "the attacks ceased," yet her financial support, he learns upon her return, will not be forthcoming. His disappointment, even after nearly forty years, is palpable: "I have never been able to see any force in the reasons for this change. It is enough, however, to say that they were sufficient for her, and that she no doubt acted conscientiously, though her change of purpose . . . placed me in an awkward position before the colored people of this country, as well as to friends abroad."[6]

Though restrained, a sense of betrayal informs these final observations on Stowe, as her change of mind would have made Douglass appear foolish in the eyes, say, of Martin Delany. Arguably, it would also make him appear foolish in the eyes of his future readers, who, armed with their knowledge of Stowe's failure to support the institution and her unattractive response to the debate on African American suffrage, could criticize Douglass for being so naive as to put his faith in a white woman who, at bottom, perhaps did lack full sympathy for America's blacks, as Delany claimed. This very essay on the reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* may, for some readers, only further put Douglass in an "awkward position," because it reveals him, rather unfashionably, as clinging to Enlightenment universalist values, transracial claims of sympathy, and an optimistic faith in black elevation at a time when the institutions of antebellum culture were working to thwart that elevation. Though it is hardly my intention to do so, this overview of Douglass's response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—a text that, despite the claims of Tompkins and others for its feminism, has increasingly been implicated in dominant modes of antebellum social power[7]—may only provide further evidence for those convinced that Douglass himself was complicitous in upholding or reinforcing dominant modes of power. For we have been instructed of late on Douglass's naivete in evoking the

6. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892; rpt., New York: Collier Books, 1962), 282, 290, 291.

7. The most persuasive recent examples are Richard H. Brodhead, "Sparing the Rod: Discipline and Fiction in Antebellum America," *Representations* 2 (1988): 67–96; Lora Romero, "Bio-Political Resistance in Domestic Ideology and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *American Literary History* 1 (1989): 715–34; and Myra Jehlen, "The Family Militant: Domesticity versus Slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Criticism* 31 (1989): 383–400.

principles of 1776 in support of slave liberation, as to do so was to "appeal to the authorizing mythology of an oppressive culture"; we have learned of his misguided efforts to speak to white readers, in that he "succeeded only in reproducing the cliches of his oppressors"; and we have been told that Douglass's affirmations of conventional antebellum notions of individualism and manhood inevitably led to the marginalization of women in his writings and gave "credence to the patriarchal structure largely responsible for his oppression."[8]

Whether these critiques of Douglass tell us more about Douglass or the imprisoning ideological imperatives of our newly dominant New Historical critical practice is something that critics will no doubt be debating for some time. In an excellent rejoinder to the New Historicist emphasis on Douglass's complicity in antebellum modes of power, Gregory S. Jay views Douglass as a rhetorician who makes tactical use of dominant languages; thus Jay warns against viewing "Douglass's invocation of humanistic discourse as only ideology in the negative sense—that is, as a maneuver in the name of the hegemonic forces of control." According to Jay, because a black speaker or writer has an "alienated relation to white language, one can argue that the black subject makes a space for opposition within ideology just by opening his or her mouth."[9] It has been my contention that in voicing his praise for Stowe's novel Douglass appropriated the novel, insisting that it do the work it announced itself as doing. In addition, by attempting to enlist Stowe to the cause of his industrial college in the name of her novel, Douglass sought to make *Uncle Tom's Cabin* do the cultural work that he wanted it to do. That a figure such as Douglass truly believed Stowe's novel could counteract the effects of the Compromise of 1850 should temper our skepticism about Stowe's large intentions and achievements and about her complicity in the power structure. Douglass's pragmatic refusal to give up on Stowe for her racialist and colonizationist ideas speaks well for his historicist perception of the cultural forces that could impinge upon the mind and rheto-

8. Yarborough, "Race, Violence, and Manhood," 180; Joseph Fichtelberg, *Faith and Method in American Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 120; and Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), 27. On Douglass and gender, see also David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989), 108–34; Jenny Franchot, "The Punishment of Esther: Frederick Douglass and the Construction of the Feminine," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, 141–65; and Yarborough, "Race, Violence, and Manhood." For a less censorious view of Douglass's appeal to American Revolutionary ideals, see Sundquist, "Frederick Douglass: Literacy and Paternalism."

9. "American Literature and the New Historicism: The Example of Frederick Douglass," *boundary* 2 17 (1990): 241. On Douglass's complex interactions with the discourse of the dominant white culture, see also Houston A. Baker Jr., *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), 32–47; and Wilson J. Moses, "Dark Forests and Barbarian Vigor: Paradox, Conflict, and Africanity in Black Writing Before 1914," *American Literary History* 1 (1989): esp. 638–43.

ric of even the most sympathetic of white Americans. His efforts to persuade Stowe to rethink her colonizationist stance and (through "The Heroic Slave") her racialism suggest that Douglass came to believe that the publication of a text—even one with so massive an authority as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—does not foreclose the possibility of dialogue between authors and readers, blacks and whites, oppressed and oppressors, when glimmers of mutual sympathy can be discerned.

SOPHIA CANTAVE

Who Gets to Create the Lasting Images? The Problem of Black Representation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*†

For late-twentieth-century teachers, the significance of Harriet Beecher Stowe as a white woman creating a national space for an "empathetic" discourse on the slave experience raises several questions. For instance, why didn't Mary Prince's exposé of slavery in the West Indies, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), or Harriet Wilson's account of de facto slavery in the American North, *Our Nig* (1859), become the proverbial "shot heard around the world"? What enabled Stowe to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and begin a national and international literary exchange on slavery? The novel invented the modern idea of a "best-seller," and many of Stowe's characters became national stock types and icons. Even today, readers cry at the right places and express horror, relief, or disbelief where textually appropriate. Most important, Stowe's text allows whites to talk to other whites about the personal and national issues surrounding the slave experience and establishes the character types usually associated with African Americans. Indeed, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and then the early twentieth century, Stowe's novel provided the nation with a shared cultural context for its discourse on slavery, offering reductive images, phrases, and symbols that quickly became the accepted norm.

For example, early in the twentieth century *Uncle Tom's Cabin* permitted the nameless narrator of James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) to talk finally to his mother about their racial identity. But what does it mean when two highly miscegenated characters use a white woman's novel as the

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