



## [Uncle Tom's Cabin](#), by Harriet Beecher Stowe

### **In A Nutshell**

Harriet Beecher Stowe's inspiration for *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* was the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made aiding or assisting runaway slaves a crime in free states. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was first published in 1852, is thus a deliberate and carefully written anti-slavery argument. Sure, it's a novel, but don't forget that it's also a sermon intended to convince a Christian audience that slavery is an evil institution and must be destroyed. And by sermon, we do mean sermon. Stowe's weapon of choice for destroying the institution of slavery was Christian love.

Controversial from the start, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* relies on racial stereotypes to get Stowe's point across. But Stowe's novel had a profound effect on the American public by exacerbating the tensions between the North and South that led to the Civil War. In a much repeated legend, President Abraham Lincoln is rumored to have said, "So you're the little lady who wrote the book that started this great war," when he met Harriet Beecher Stowe. The novel was a bestseller in the 19th century, selling over 300,000 copies in its first year, and has been translated into over 60 languages.

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## Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 What is "freedom"? What opportunities and responsibilities accompany freedom?
- 2 What are the limits on freedom? Are limits to freedom a good thing or a bad thing? Why?
- 3 Historically, what were the links between slavery and religion? What were the links between emancipation/abolition and religion? Why and how was Christianity used to justify both?

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