

Few that the racial
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prevailed



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Few books can truly be said to have altered the course of history, and even fewer can be said to have started an entire war. Uncle Tom's Cabin, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, was one such novel. It is a realistic, although fictional view of slavery, that burned into the consciousness of America the images of brutal beatings and unfair slave practices. Uncle Tom's Cabin helped to turn the tide of public opinion against slavery in the 19th century. This controversial novel was initially written to question slavery and to convince people of its immorality. It was the first book that brought the problem of slavery in America to the attention of the world.

It became not only a bestseller, but a social documentary of the lives of slaves. The closest parallel to the success of Uncle Tom's Cabin was Sinclair's *The Jungle*, but even *The Jungle* did not start an entire war. The main characters in this story are Uncle Tom, Eliza and George Harris.

Uncle Tom is a good man, trustworthy, a model slave. He refused to make trouble, and is accepting of an institution he cannot change. A very spiritual person, Uncle Tom tries his best to obey the Bible and to do what is right. He is the figure meant to show the good of man, and how that good was trampled by an unjust institution. Eliza is a beautiful slave owned by George Shelby, Sr., the same person who owns Tom. Eliza has a son, Harry. Eliza's husband, George Harris, lives on a nearby plantation.

George is a brilliant man, and invented a machine that was used in the factory he works in. His owner became jealous and demoted George from his factory job to doing hard labor on the plantation. This is an allusion to other unjust practices of the time, and shows that the racial inequities that

prevailed even outside the institution of slavery. This is one way that Stowe provokes the reader towards a cause for abolitionism, and show the need for change. Because his Kentucky plantation was overwhelmed by debt, Shelby makes plans to trade some slaves to a slave dealer in exchange for debts being canceled. The dealer selects Uncle Tom as payment for the debt.

Eliza quickly decides to run away, quickly followed by her husband George Harris. George just happens to go to the same place where Eliza and Harry are being hidden. Uncle Tom, meanwhile, is on a boat en route to New Orleans. After gallantly saving the life of young Eva St. Clare, he is rewarded by being bought by her father, Augustine. Augustine is married to a selfish woman who claims to be sick and takes no interest in her daughter. So it is on his return trip from Maine where he has picked up his cousin Ophelia who will care for Eva that Augustine buys Tom.

Unused to Southern customs and slavery, Ophelia tries to bring order to the St. Claire plantation, but the pampered slaves do not cooperate. Eva, who has always been frail, was dying and asks her father to free his slaves. This is yet another death which shows the tragedy of the institution, a death that simply cannot be left unavenged.

This instance beseeches the reader to feel the pain of the enslaved man and rise up for the cause of abolition. For weeks, Uncle Tom tries in vain to please his new master. Legree has enough of Tom's kindness and piety, after Tom was ordered to beat another female slave and refused. For this show of obstinance, Tom was beaten until he fainted. This is where the novel truly becomes an eye opening expose', leaving any reader with a need to rectify

the horror of the cruelties in the narrative. Tom is soon beaten again, to the point of death.

This brutality shows yet again the terror and the inhumane practices of the slaveowners, not allowing any reader to simply ignore the cries of Tom. His death stands as a lesson to the people of the time, a death that signified the culture of death that prevailed in slavery. Not merely physical death, but the spiritual massacre that occurred