

Unit 7

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

Race and Identity in Antebellum America

Authors and Works

Featured in the Video:

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (autobiography/slave narrative), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (autobiography/slave narrative), “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro” (speech)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (autobiography/slave narrative)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (sentimental novel)

Discussed in This Unit:

Sorrow Songs (African American musical tradition)
Briton Hammon, “Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon” (captivity narrative)

Lydia Maria Child, “Mrs. Child’s Reply” (letter)

Abraham Lincoln, “A House Divided,” “Gettysburg Address,” “Second Inaugural Address” (speeches)

Lorenzo Asisara, “Punishment” (oral narrative, recorded by editor)

William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (slave narrative)

Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor* (history), *Ramona* (novel)

Overview Questions

■ How do racial divisions in nineteenth-century American culture exclude African Americans and Native Americans from American ideals of liberty and inclusion?

■ How do texts by African American and Native American writers expand and transform concepts of American identity and citizenship?

■ What are the distinguishing characteristics of

the genre of the slave narrative? How was the genre developed, adapted, and modified by the writers included in this unit? How does the slave narrative compare to the captivity narratives written in the seventeenth century (Mary Rowlandson’s narrative, for example)?

■ How do ideals of domesticity, femininity, and sentimentality shape nineteenth-century American literature and reform movements?

■ How do the regional differences between the American North, South, and West (geographic, economic, and demographic) influence antebellum literature?

■ What is the relationship between oral expressions such as Sorrow Songs and printed literature? How did African American oral traditions influence American music and literature?

■ What is the relationship between slave narratives and captivity narratives? How did the genre of the slave narrative influence the development of autobiographical writing and the novel in America?

■ How does abolitionist rhetoric expand and transform the ideals set out in foundational national documents such as the Declaration of Independence?

■ How do black writers revise the myth of the “self-made man” to include African Americans?

■ How do both abolitionist and pro-slavery writers use biblical imagery and Christian ideals to support their positions?

Learning Objectives

After students have viewed the video, read the headnotes and literary selections in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, read this unit, and explored related archival materials on the *American Passages* Web site, they should be able to

1. understand how the antebellum debate about slavery transformed and expanded foundational ideas about American identity and citizenship;
2. see and discuss the different strategies slaves adopted to resist white authority and to develop their own distinct culture;
3. explain the importance of sentimentality and domesticity within the nineteenth-century literature of social reform;
4. understand the role of literature in both shaping and reflecting political reform movements.

Instructor Overview

When the founding fathers affirmed their commitment to the inalienable rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” in 1776, they opted not to struggle with the troubling question of how slavery fit into this ideal. But the contradiction inherent in the legally sanctioned enslavement of four million people in a country ostensibly founded on principles of freedom eventually became too discomfiting to ignore. By the mid-nineteenth century, the conflict over slavery had reached a crisis point, creating irresolvable tensions among the North, the South, and the West. In Abraham Lincoln’s words, the nation had become as a “house divided against itself,” embroiled in a domestic struggle that threatened to destroy the union. Many Americans concluded that the only solution lay in transforming American culture, and writers, both black and white, responded by creating a revolutionary literature committed to the overthrow of slavery. Autobiographies by former slaves, polemical speeches and editorials, and sentimental novels confronted their audiences with powerful narratives of the cruelty and destructiveness of slavery. These anti-slavery texts had overt designs upon their readers, using emotional rhetoric and didacticism to call the American populace to action in the interests of social reform. Anti-slavery literature also had the important effect of exposing the arbitrary nature of racial distinctions, thus challenging prejudices that had long been used to justify discrimination and inequality. Unit 7, “Slavery and Freedom,” explores representations of race and identity in a wide variety of American texts, including the Sorrow Songs, which were developed communally within slave culture, and works composed

by Briton Hammon, Lydia Maria Child, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Jacobs, William Craft, Lorenzo Asisara, and Helen Hunt Jackson. The institution of slavery is often understood as a phenomenon limited to the antebellum period in the South. In fact, slavery existed in many other historical periods and geographical locations in America, including the northern colonies (mostly, though not exclusively, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and in California, where Anglos and Hispanic Californios enslaved Native Americans. Unit 7 includes materials about Native American enslavement in order to add another dimension to students’ understanding of slavery. This unit provides contextual background and classroom materials designed to explore the way these writers both challenged traditional myths about America and helped to create new national ideals.

The video for Unit 7 focuses on three influential abolitionist texts. Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Harriet Jacobs’s autobiographical *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* all participate in the effort to convince readers slavery was unjust, but adopt very different rhetorical strategies to appeal to their audiences. Drawing on a variety of literary conventions, these texts expose the way race, gender, and social position inflect their writers’ distinct approaches to the abolitionist cause.

Frederick Douglass’s autobiography chronicles his early experiences of oppression, his rebellion, and his eventual heroic achievement of a fully liberated sense of self and identity. Emphasizing the importance of literacy and active resistance, he recasts the American myth of the “self-made man” to include African Americans. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs modifies the conventions of the masculine slave narrative to chart her own life. Focusing on the specific plight of women held in slavery—and particularly on the sexual exploitation they often endured—her autobiography both appropriates and challenges the discourse of sentimentality. Situated squarely within the sentimental tradition, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* unabashedly appeals to readers’ emotions with affective scenes of pathos and tragedy. The novel sold hundreds of thousands of copies, bringing the abolitionist cause to the forefront of American consciousness.

In its coverage of these influential writers and texts, the video introduces students to the complexities of antebellum debates about slavery and race and foregrounds the relationship between literature and social reform. How do these texts critique an entrenched, racist ideology of white superiority? How do they recast American ideals of liberty and self-determination to include African Americans? What rhetorical strategies do they employ to effect social reform? How do they work within the constraints of literary and social conventions and yet still assert unique perspectives? Unit 7 helps answer these questions by offering suggestions on how to connect these writers to their nineteenth-century cultural contexts, to other units in the series, and to other key writers of the era. The curriculum materials help fill in the video's introduction to slavery and identity by exploring writers who articulated other, diverse experiences, such as Lorenzo Asisara (a Native American enslaved on a Franciscan Mission in California), Briton Hammon (an African American who endured both slavery in America and captivity among the Spanish), William Craft (a fugitive slave who escaped by disguising his wife as a white man), and many others.

The video, the archive, and the curriculum materials situate these writers within several of the historical contexts and stylistic conventions that shaped their texts: (1) the ideals of femininity and domesticity that shaped nineteenth-century women's lives; (2) the dynamic creole culture that African American slaves created out of the adversity of their situation; (3) slave strategies of rebellion and resistance; (4) the issue of "miscegenation"; and (5) the mythology of the plantation.

The archive and the curriculum materials suggest how these authors and texts relate to those covered in other *American Passages* units: How do antebellum African American autobiographies adapt and modify earlier literary traditions, such as the captivity narrative and the spiritual autobiography? How does the slave narrative provide a foundation for a rich tradition of African American writing, from W. E. B. Du Bois to Toni Morrison? How does abolitionist discourse revise enlightenment rhetoric from the revolutionary period? How does enslavement of Native Americans in nineteenth-century California resonate with sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century discrimination against Indians? How and why has race remained a con-

stant and controversial issue in American culture and literature?

Student Overview

Unit 7, "Slavery and Freedom: Race and Identity in Antebellum America," explores the problem that slavery posed to a country ostensibly founded on principles of freedom and equality. By the mid-nineteenth century, the nation had become, to quote Abraham Lincoln, like a "house divided against itself," embroiled in a domestic struggle over slavery that created irresolvable tensions among the North, the South, and the West. Many Americans concluded that the only solution lay in transforming American culture, and writers, both black and white, responded by creating a revolutionary literature committed to the overthrow of slavery. Autobiographies by former slaves, polemical speeches and editorials, and sentimental novels confronted their audiences with powerful narratives of the destructiveness and cruelty of slavery.

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All of the writers discussed in Unit 7 share an interest in the role of race in American culture as well as a commitment to promoting social reform. Focusing on such diverse issues as the enslavement of Native Americans in California and the implica-

tions of cross-dressing and racial passing, these texts help illuminate the ways abolitionist writers both challenged traditional myths about America and helped to create new ideals. By exploring problems

of slavery and identity in antebellum texts, Unit 7 provides insight into the question of why race has remained a constant and controversial issue in American culture and literature.

Video Overview

- **Authors covered:** Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Beecher Stowe
- **Who's interviewed:** Nina Baym, general editor, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, and professor of English (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign); Frederick Douglass IV, great-great grandson of Frederick Douglass; John Carlos Rowe, professor of English and comparative literature (University of California, Irvine); Richard Yarborough, associate professor of English and African American studies (University of California, Los Angeles); Rafia Zafar, director of African and African American studies (Washington University)
- **Points covered:**
 - The video explains the development of a slave-based plantation economy in the American South and northern abolitionist opposition to slavery.
 - Students will be introduced to the tradition of slave autobiographies and abolitionist fiction, literature which powerfully engaged readers' emotions in order to create social change. Abolitionist literature was instrumental in propelling the nation into the Civil War.
 - Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) generated a great deal of attention and sympathy for the abolitionist cause. Thematising the importance of literacy and active resistance, his narrative recasts the American myth of the "self-made man" to include African Americans.
 - With *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs wrote the first female-authored slave narrative published in the United States. Focusing on the specific plight of enslaved African American women, her autobiography uses the discourse of sentimentality to appeal to a white female readership.
 - Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* took the nation by storm in 1852. Unabashedly sentimental, the novel reflects Stowe's goal of making northerners actually feel the pain of enslaved African Americans. Although Stowe's use of racist stereotypes makes her story problematic for modern readers, *Uncle Tom's*

Cabin was enormously important in generating support for the abolitionist cause in the nineteenth century.

- The writings of antebellum African Americans transformed the genre of autobiography in the United States and created the foundation for a rich tradition of African American literature.

PREVIEW

- **Preview the video:** In the early and mid-nineteenth century, America found itself increasingly divided over the volatile issue of slavery. The economy and cultural traditions of the southern states continued to depend on the institution of slave labor, while northern opposition to the destructive nature of the "peculiar institution" reached new heights. Determined to free the country from the blight of slavery, white and African American abolitionists wrote to generate public support for liberty and equality. Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs published powerful autobiographical accounts of their experiences as slaves and their decisions to escape, helping to develop the genre of the slave narrative in the process. Harriet Beecher Stowe mobilized the literary tradition of sentimentality to further the abolitionist cause in her blockbuster novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A highly emotional—and sometimes racist—story of the tragedy of slavery and the power of Christian sacrifice, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* brought the issue of African American slavery to the forefront of American consciousness. All three of these writers profoundly influenced subsequent developments in American literature and offer important insight into how literature can both reflect and produce social change.
- **What to think about while watching:** What abuses of slavery do these writers bring to their readers' attention? What rhetorical strategies do they adopt to encourage their audience to support the abolitionist cause? How do race and gender influence their writing? How do the writers and texts explored in the video both transform traditional American myths and ideals as well as shape new

Video Overview (continued)

ones? How have their efforts influenced American culture and literature?

- **Tying the video to the unit content:** Unit 7 expands on the issues outlined in the video to explore further the evolution of American attitudes toward race and slavery in the nineteenth century. The curriculum materials offer background on abolitionist, African American, and

Native American writers and texts not featured in the video. The unit offers contextual background to expand on the video’s introduction to the political issues, historical events, and literary styles that shaped the literature of social protest and racial consciousness in the nineteenth century.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE VIDEO

	What is an American? How does American literature create conceptions of the American experience and identity?	How are American myths created, challenged, and re-imagined through this literature?	What is American literature? What are the distinctive voices and styles in American literature? How do social and political issues influence the American canon?
Compre- hension Questions	How does Frederick Douglass learn to read? Why does literacy become so important to him?	What kinds of racial stereotypes does Stowe employ in developing the characters of <i>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</i> ?	What is “sentimentality”? To what kind of audience was sentimental rhetoric designed to appeal?
Context Questions	Why do you think Harriet Jacobs published under a pseudonym? What kinds of anxieties did she feel about making her story public? How did her narrative engage with nineteenth-century ideas about womanhood?	How do slave narratives recast the American ideal of the “self-made man” to fit African Americans? How does Frederick Douglass, for example, build on and transform the legacy of Benjamin Franklin?	What is the relationship between Jacobs’s account of her slavery and escape and Douglass’s account of his? How does she borrow and modify some of the conventions Douglass pioneered in his autobiography? Do you think they wrote for the same kind of audience? How are her concerns different from his?
Exploratory Questions	How do the writers featured in the video use formulas and conventions to tell their stories, yet still manage to speak in their own authentic voices?	How do you think abolitionist rhetoric might have influenced the civil rights movement in the 1960s? How do you think it influenced subsequent treatments of race in American literature?	How do slave narratives draw on the seventeenth-century tradition of captivity narratives? How did slave narratives influence the work of later African American authors (Charles W. Chesnutt, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, or Toni Morrison, for example)?

TIMELINE

	Texts	Contexts
18th Century	Samuel Sewall, <i>The Selling of Joseph</i> , first American anti-slavery tract (1700) John Woolman, <i>On the Keeping of Negroes</i> (1754)	Peak years of British slave trade (1720–80) Growing religious criticism of slavery as sin, rise of free black and slave Christianity (1740s–90s)
1760s	Briton Hammon, “Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon” (1760)	Enlightenment political egalitarianism conflicts with emerging Enlightenment scientific racialism (post-1750)
1770s	Phillis Wheatley, <i>Poems</i> (1773)	American Revolution (1775–83) Declaration of Independence (1776) Spanish missions founded in Alta California (1769–1823)
1780s	Thomas Jefferson, <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i> (1785) Olaudah Equiano, <i>Narrative of the Life</i> (1789)	Constitution accepts slavery, sets end of slave imports at 1808 (1789) Four of first five U.S. presidents are slave owners (1789–1825)
1790s		Haitian slave revolution leads to Louisiana Purchase (1791–1803) Invention of cotton gin (1793)
1800s		British slave trade abolished (1807) Slave imports to United States outlawed (1808)
1810s		Mexican independence wars (1810–20)
1820s	David Walker, <i>Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World</i> (1829)	Missouri Compromise (1820) Denmark Vesey Conspiracy executions (South Carolina) (1822) Chumash Indian rebellion against California missions (1824) Andrew Jackson elected president (1828); “Jacksonian Democracy”: white male equality, pro-slavery, anti-Indian wars and removals Mexico abolishes slavery (1829)
1830s		Influence of “Second Great Awakening” expands abolitionism (1830s) Nat Turner rebellion (Virginia) (1831) American Anti-Slavery Society formed (1833) British Empire abolishes slavery (1833–38) Mexican California missions secularized, rise of private peonage of native tenants (1833–36)

TIMELINE *(continued)*

	Texts	Contexts
1840s	Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (1845)	New England textile industrialization tied to slave-grown southern cotton (1840s) Slave rebellion aboard <i>Amistad</i> (1841) U.S.–Mexican War; annexations include California (1846–48) California Indian population falls from c. 150,000 to c. 50,000 from disease, violence, and starvation (1848–70) California Gold Rush (1849–51)
1850s	Harriet Beecher Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</i> (1852) Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro” (1852) Herman Melville, “Benito Cereno” (1855) Abraham Lincoln, “A House Divided Cannot Stand” (1858) Lydia Maria Child, “Mrs. Child’s Answer” (1859)	Compromise of 1850: California a free state, other former Mexican territories open to slavery, Fugitive Slave Act Kansas-Nebraska Act, civil conflict in Kansas (1854–65) Dred Scott decision declares Negroes not national citizens (1857)
1860s	William Craft, <i>Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom: The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery</i> (1860) Harriet Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (1863) Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address” (1863) Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address” (1865)	White population of California over 200,000, intensifying Indian peonage (1860) Civil War (1861–65) 13th Amendment to Constitution abolishes slavery (1865) “Congressional” or “Radical” Reconstruction; 14th and 15th Amendments expand civil rights, affirm black citizenship (1867–77) Formation of Ku Klux Klan (1867) First transcontinental railroad (1869)
1870s	Lorenzo Asisara, “Punishment” (oral testimony recorded 1877; published 1890)	Civil rights, anti-Klan laws (1870–72) End of Reconstruction (1877)
1880s	Helen Hunt Jackson, <i>Ramona</i> (1884)	White “Redemption” in South, spreading disenfranchisement, lynching, debt peonage of blacks (1880s) Dawes Act leads to wide Indian land losses (1887)

AUTHOR/TEXT REVIEW

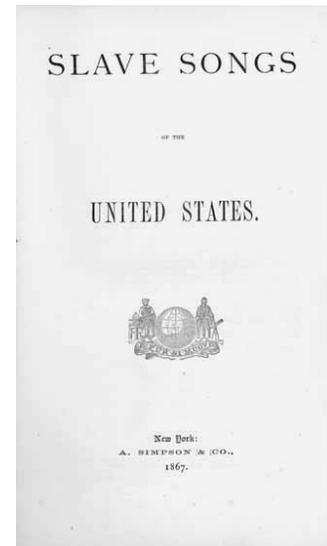
Sorrow Songs

Drawing on both African musical styles and western European sources, black slaves in the antebellum South created a rich musical tradition of **Sorrow Songs**, or spirituals. These songs fulfilled a variety of functions within slave culture: workers timed their labor to the tempo of their music, preserved and articulated communal values, and transcended the restrictions of slavery through meaningful self-expression. As Lawrence W. Levine points out, despite their name, Sorrow Songs do not express only sorrow or despair; but can be “permeated by a sense of change, transcendence, ultimate justice, and personal worth.” Characterized by their use of traditional West African rhythmic and harmonic patterns, the spirituals often employ a “call and response” pattern in which a leader sings or chants a few lines and the group repeats or offers variations on the lines in response. The songs thus draw upon many of the practices central to the African cultures the slaves had been forced to leave behind, emphasizing the primacy of the spoken word, celebrating verbal improvisation, and encouraging group participation. The spirituals included here were not rigidly codified or authored by a single person; instead, they are the result of communal authorship and a strong tradition of extemporaneous improvisations. Singers often mix lyrics from different songs together, graft lyrics onto new tunes, or create completely new stanzas in the course of performing a song. In some sense, then, the printed lyrics in this unit offer a false picture of the songs as “finished” or “frozen” when in fact they constantly change and evolve in performance.

The songs developed out of the slave tradition are mostly religious in nature, but their spiritual subjects often had concrete applications to the slaves’ daily lives and their concerns in this world. The songs draw primarily on images of heaven and stories from the Old Testament, especially the story of Moses leading the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt to freedom. In “Go Down, Moses,” for example, slave singers likened themselves to the Israelites and their oppressors to the Egyptian Pharaoh. In this way, African Americans incorporated sacred prophecy into everyday life, articulating hope for both spiritual salvation and literal emancipation. Sorrow Songs could also function as a method of secret communication between slaves. Often incomprehensible to whites, the lyrics could protest slave conditions, mock masters and mistresses, call other slaves to secret meetings, and even aid run-aways and revolts. The spiritual “Steal Away to Jesus,” for instance, was used as a code song to assist people escaping along the Underground Railroad.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Use the sound files in the archive to play a recorded version of at least one of the songs included in this unit so students can have an aural experience of the music. If you have a strong voice or musical



[6753] William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison, Title page, *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867).

SORROW SONGS WEB ARCHIVE

[6753] William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867). Title page of early collection of Sorrow Songs. Former abolitionists transcribed lyrics of the songs of ex-slaves to appeal for funding from northern whites to establish schools for freedpeople.

[7131] Anonymous, *Many Thousands Gone* (c. 1861–65), courtesy of Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs: A Study in Racial and National Music* (4th ed., 1914), Fisk University. Sorrow Songs often referred to current events through religious language. The lyrics of “Many Thousand Gone” refer partly to the hundreds of thousands of slaves who escaped to the North, with some joining the Union

Army during the Civil War.

Simultaneously, the song refers to the many who have died and gone to the afterlife.

[7132] Anonymous, *Steal Away to Jesus* (n.d.), courtesy of John Work, *Folk Songs of the American Negro* (1907), Fisk University. The lyrics to this song remind listeners that those who obey the Lord are assured of ultimate salvation, while unredeemed sinners, whether slaves or “masters,” have cause to tremble. It might also refer to “stealing away” to forbidden worship meetings, or it could be an Underground Railroad code.

[7133] Anonymous, *Go Down, Moses* (n.d.), courtesy of Natalie Curtis-Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs*, Hampton Series 6716, G. Schirmer (1918). Slaves used Old Testament texts to reject slave owners’ claims that Christianity justified slavery. Singers adopted the voice of God commanding Moses to carry a message to Pharaoh (the slaveholder) to let “my people” (the slaves) go. The song is an example of the African tradition of *Nommo*, or the belief in the power of language.

[7134] Anonymous, *Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel* (n.d.), courtesy of James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), Viking Press. These lyrics speak of African Americans’ hope for delivery from both the enslavement of sin and human enslavement. Compiler James Weldon Johnson, a New Negro Renaissance intellectual and author, took pride in slave ancestors and their creations.

accompaniment, you might consider leading your class in a spiritual. Encourage students to improvise if they are moved to do so. The experience of participating in a performance should help students understand the important role of audience and communal authorship in the development of this musical tradition.

■ Students may be resistant to the idea that songs and oral traditions should be studied in a literature class. Engage them in the question of what constitutes literature and what appropriate objects of study in a literature class might be. How are these songs different from more “formal” poetry? (You might distribute a copy of a more traditional poem such as a sonnet so that the contrast will be clearer.) Does it matter that the songs are constantly changing? How does our understanding of the songs change when we study them in a literature classroom rather than in a music classroom?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Paraphrase one of the Sorrow Songs in your own words, eliminating repetition and ambiguity whenever possible. Compare your version to the original and think about what has been lost in your “translation.” Why do you think repetition is central to many of the spirituals? What is the effect of repetition in the songs?

Context: In his *Narrative*, Frederick Douglass points out that slave songs reveal “at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness.” What does he mean by this? Explain how a duality of expression and purpose inflects these songs.

Context: How do the spirituals challenge and protest the institution of slavery? What is subversive in these songs? Why do you think white masters and mistresses for the most part missed the rebellious implications of this music?

Exploration: How does the Sorrow Songs’ use of Old Testament images—especially the image of the enslaved Israelites—compare to the New England Puritans’ use of such images? Do the slave songs engage in a form of typologizing? Why or why not?

Exploration: Listen to a recording of one or more of the spirituals. How do you think these songs influenced the subsequent development of American musical culture? What is the relationship between these early African American songs and subsequent African American musical forms, such as jazz, blues, and hip-hop?

Briton Hammon (fl. 1760)

Briton Hammon’s “Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man,” published in Boston in 1760, is generally recognized as the earliest published autobiography by an African American. Composed in the tradition of the popular Indian captivity genre, Hammon’s narrative tells an exciting tale of travel, shipwreck, bondage among Native American and Spanish captors, and daring escapes. Unfortunately, no details of

Hammon's life are known beyond those recorded in the "Narrative." Although he does not discuss his race within the body of the text—only the title identifies him as a "Negro Man"—he does refer to himself as a "servant" and makes frequent mention of his "master." Thus, while it is unclear whether Hammon was held as a slave or worked as a servant, it is evident that he occupied a subordinate position within colonial society. In some ways, the "Narrative" reinforces traditional ideals of servitude as a benevolent institution: Hammon seems delighted when he is finally reunited with his "good old master" and happily returns to Boston with him. But Hammon's text also implicitly critiques slavery by figuring human captivity as a "barbarous" and "inhuman" practice that should be resisted.

Hammon's "Narrative" recounts the experiences of a person of marginal social status, someone whose life usually would have gone unrecorded. Sometimes viewed as a hybrid of an Indian captivity and **slave narrative**, Hammon's story is complicated by the fact that when he is finally redeemed from captivity, it is into a condition of servitude rather than of freedom. Ironically, he may actually have experienced greater freedom among the Native Americans and Spanish than he would have after returning to Boston with his master.

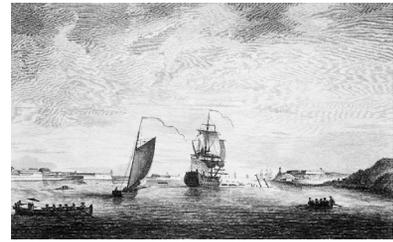
TEACHING TIPS

■ Critics have debated whether Hammon composed his "Narrative" entirely on his own or employed a white editor to write all or part of it. Some suggest that the religiously orthodox opening and closing of the text point to the hand of a white minister, while others argue that such formulaic qualities are merely traditional characteristics of the captivity genre and thus offer little insight into its authorship. Ask students what they think of this debate. How would it change our understanding of the text if we could establish whether Hammon wrote it on his own or dictated it to a white writer?

■ Hammon opens his "Narrative" with a modest disavowal of his own ability to properly "read" his experiences: "As my capacities and conditions of life are very low, it cannot be expected that I should make those remarks on the sufferings I have met with, or the kind providence of a good God for my preservation, as one in a higher station, but shall leave that to the reader as he goes along, and so I shall only relate matters of fact as they occur to my mind." Ask students to consider why Hammon begins his text this way. Why might this opening have been appealing to his audience? How sincere is Hammon's protestation of his own "low capacities"? Does he in fact restrict himself only to "matters of fact" in recounting his experiences?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: How does Hammon view the Native Americans who capture him in Florida? How does he view the Spanish in Cuba? How does he feel about the Catholicism of his Spanish captors? How does captivity compare with servitude in his experience?



[6830] Peter Canot, *A View of the Entrance of the Harbour of the Havana, Taken from within the Wrecks* (1764), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-105952].

HAMMON WEB ARCHIVE

[1742] Homann Hereditors, *Guinea Propia Nec Non Nigritiae Vel Terrae Nigrorum Maxima Pars . . .* (1743), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division. This map of West Africa (Guinea) shows European slave-trade forts, coastal slave-trading kingdoms, but little of the interior where many slaves were captured. It also depicts ivory and Africans wearing imported cloth and hats, but not slaves.

[2603] *Harper's Weekly*, *The Africans of the Slave Bark "Wildfire"—The Slave Deck of the Bark "Wildfire," Brought into Key West on April, 30, 1860. African Men Crowded onto the Lower Deck; African Women Crowded on an Upper Deck* (1860), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-41678]. This engraving shows the crowded conditions aboard slave ships. Such depictions of the inhumanity of slavery provided powerful imagery that helped strengthen the growing abolition movement in the United States.

[3601] Anonymous, "Slave Auction at Richmond Virginia," *Illustrated London News*, Sept. 27, 1865 (1865), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-15398]. This woodcut engraving depicts the auction of an African American

woman. As with the figure of the tragic mulatta, slavery is here feminized to invoke sympathy for the abolitionist cause. The *Illustrated London News* was founded in 1842 by Henry Ingram, a liberal who favored social reform.

[6830] Peter Canot, *A View of the Entrance of the Harbour of the Havana, Taken from within the Wrecks* (1764), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-105952]. Havana, Cuba, was one of the ports visited by Briton Hammon as a sailor. Trade in sugar, slaves, and other commodities linked the Caribbean, Africa, North America, and Europe.

[6950] Briton Hammon, *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man . . .* [Frontispiece] (1760), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division. Front page of the earliest-known autobiographical narrative by an African American. Hammon's model helped establish a close relationship between the autobiographical genres of captivity narratives and slave narratives.

Comprehension: What role does Christianity play in Hammon's understanding of his experiences? When and how does he invoke God in the course of relating his story?

Context: What is the relationship between Hammon's "Narrative" and the narratives of slave escapes that became popular in the nineteenth century (such as those written by Douglass, Craft, or Jacobs, for example)? What historical factors might have caused the tone and subjects of slave narratives to change so dramatically?

Exploration: At several points in his text, Hammon describes his happiness at seeing the English flag, or "English Colours," and identifies himself as an "Englishman." What does being English seem to mean to Hammon? What insights does the "Narrative" provide us into the role of nationalism and national identity within the maritime world along the Atlantic coasts?

Exploration: How does Hammon's "Narrative" compare with the Indian captivity narratives written by Anglo-Americans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Mary Rowlandson's *Narrative*, for example)? How are Hammon's concerns different? In what ways are his experiences and reactions similar to those of white captives?

Lydia Maria Child (1802–1880)

Lydia Maria Child (born Lydia Francis) was raised outside of Boston in a community she described as made up of "hard-working people who had small opportunity for culture." Her parents ran a bakery while raising six children, leaving them little time for intellectual pursuits. Still, Child, encouraged by her Harvard-educated older brother, developed an early interest in books and learning. By 1820, she had completed her training as a teacher and begun working at a school in Maine. She soon moved back to Massachusetts, where she started a school for girls and kept house for her brother, who had become a Unitarian minister. When she joined the Unitarian Church herself, Child adopted a new name to signal her independence and new identity. Rebaptized as Lydia Maria, she preferred to be called Maria for the rest of her life.

Child embarked on her literary career after reading a piece in *The North American Review* in 1821 calling for American authors to take American colonial history and Native American life as subjects for their fiction. Taking up the challenge, Child wrote *Hobomok*, a tale of interracial marriage between a Puritan woman and an Indian man set in colonial Salem. Although *Hobomok* was published when Child was only twenty-two, the novel was an early illustration of the concern with social justice and commitment to ending racism that would dominate her subsequent work. While many critics pronounced the novel, with its moving portrait of racial intermarriage, "in very bad taste," it immediately catapulted Child to literary celebrity. Capitalizing on her success, she soon produced another historical novel and the first periodical for children published in the United States, *The Juvenile Miscellany*.

In 1828, Lydia Maria married David Child, a man who shared her commitment to radical social causes. Unfortunately, he was also

extremely impractical and prone to debt, leaving the couple dependent upon Child's literary efforts to support their household. While living with David, she successfully published housekeeping manuals, a history of the condition of women, and stories and articles for a variety of American journals. In 1833, Child changed the course of her career with the publication of *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, a sweeping indictment of slavery and racism addressed primarily to a female audience. The pamphlet was greeted with hostility and damaged Child's mainstream popularity, but it also pushed her to the forefront of the radical abolitionist movement in the North. Affiliated with **abolitionism**, the movement for women's rights, and advocacy of Native American rights, Child had marked herself as a radical and a reformer.

In 1841, Child informally separated from her husband and moved to New York City to edit *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, an abolitionist newspaper, and to work as a correspondent for the *Boston Courier*. Composing weekly "Letters from New York," Child reported on a broad spectrum of urban life, including problems of poverty, crime, and racism. She eventually collected this groundbreaking journalistic work into the two-volume *Letters from New York* (1843, 1845).

In 1843, exhausted by divisions within the abolition movement, Child resigned as editor of the *Anti-Slavery Standard*. In 1850, ending nine years of independence, she reunited with her husband and moved to a village outside Boston where she cared for her ailing father and continued writing on behalf of the causes that had motivated her early career. While some of her work was very public, such as the stirring letters she wrote in defense of John Brown and his raid on Harpers Ferry, Child also worked behind the scenes, helping Harriet Jacobs edit her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. All of Child's anti-slavery writing and editing work was crucial to the development of the abolitionist movement. Some 300,000 copies of the pamphlet collection of her abolitionist letters circulated in 1860, effectively galvanizing anti-slavery sentiment in the North.

Upon her death in Wayland, Massachusetts, Child left a legacy of pioneering literary achievement. In her nonfiction work, she gave voice to the perspectives and concerns of traditionally marginalized groups. In her fiction, she mixed sentimentality with calls for social reform, creating a powerful formula that would be imitated by writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Helen Hunt Jackson.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Child composed her "Reply" within the context of her defense of John Brown and his raid on Harpers Ferry. Since some students might be unfamiliar with this incident, you should provide them with the historical background. Brown was a white man who was committed to eradicating slavery by whatever means necessary—including violent resistance and aggression. On the night of October 16, 1859, Brown and a group of about twenty followers (including five black men) crossed from Maryland to Virginia in an attempt to take over the



[6766] L. Schamer, *Lydia Maria Child* (1870), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-5535].

CHILD WEB ARCHIVE

[1666] Anonymous, *The Harpers Ferry Insurrection—The US Marines Storming the Engine House—Insurgents Firing Through Holes in the Doors* (1859), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-126970]. This illustration from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* depicts the end of John Brown's raid on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry.

[2773] Anonymous, *Attack on the Insurgents at the Bridge by the Railroad Men* (1859), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-90728]. This illustration from *The Life, trial, and execution of Captain John Brown, known as "Old Brown of Ossawatimie"* depicts Brown's raid on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Brown sought to overthrow slavery by armed slave revolt.

[3090] Harriet Powers, Pictorial quilt (c. 1895–98), courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Many slave and freed women used quilts to record their histories. Some quilts communicated messages; for example, quilts using the color black are believed to have indicated a safe house on the Underground Railroad.

[3147] James Brown Marston, *The Old State House* [Boston] (1801), courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society. As the nineteenth century began, immigration, industrialization, and the advent of capitalism began to change American cities from barter economies to commercial ones (Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible*). Boston became the stronghold for Unitarians, who were often associated with the new wealthy merchant class.

[3458] American Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia, *Declaration of the Anti-Slavery Convention, 1833* (1833), courtesy of the Library of Congress. At this convention, sixty abolitionist leaders declared their dedication to fighting slavery through nonviolent means. Abolitionists hoped to win sympathizers by using quotations from the Bible to emphasize the conflict between slavery and Christianity. The woodprint by R. S. Gilbert illustrates Psalm 91.13, “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.”

[6766] L. Schamer, *Lydia Maria Child* (1870), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-5535]. Child was a prominent abolitionist and women’s rights advocate. Her first novel, *Hobomok*, about “the noblest savage,” was written in the sentimental literary tradition. Child edited Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

[6949] Harriet Powers, Biblical quilt (c. 1886), courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History. Powers, a black woman from Athens, Georgia, made quilts depicting biblical scenes both before and after her emancipation. Both slaves and freed people used Christianity to interpret their hard circumstances and find hope.

federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry. Their goal was to set up a base from which to organize, arm, and support slave insurrections throughout the South.

While Brown and his group managed to take the arsenal by surprise and seize several hostages, the Virginia militia quickly responded to defend the arsenal. By the morning of October 18, Brown’s men had killed four people and wounded nine, while the Virginia militia had killed ten of Brown’s group (including two of his sons) and captured seven (including Brown). Convicted of treason against the state and conspiracy to incite insurrection, Brown was hanged on December 2 at Charlestown, Virginia.

Although he failed to achieve his immediate purpose at Harpers Ferry, Brown succeeded in becoming a martyr for the abolitionist cause. Throughout the North, people responded with sympathy and admiration for Brown’s action; Ralph Waldo Emerson even called him a “new saint.” Southern commentators, on the other hand, declared him a “hoary-headed murderer.” John Brown’s raid, occurring as it did on the eve of the Civil War, became a touchstone for the conflicts that divided North and South.

After giving your students this background, you might ask them to stage a debate or mock trial of Brown (perhaps drawing some of their arguments from “Mrs. Child’s Reply”). Ask some of the class to work as prosecutors, some as defenders, and some as the jury.

■ In *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, African American writer Alice Walker argues that sometimes women’s traditions are best represented by nonverbal artistry, such as quilts. For slave women who never wrote their narratives, quilts became a way to record their histories. These quilts were made from discarded scraps of material and clothing. Some quilts communicated messages in a straightforward way: for example, members of the Underground Railroad hung quilts with the color black on clotheslines to indicate a safe house. Other quilts were subtler. Like authors of slave narratives, African American quilters also used biblical references in their quilts. Ask students to examine the quilts featured in the archive. What stories are being told in them? How do the quilts draw on and transform biblical stories? How do these quilts compare to the written narratives of slavery included in this unit?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Consider the opening of Child’s “Reply.” What role do biblical quotations play in her argument against slavery? Why do you think this might have been an effective rhetorical strategy?

Context: Compare Child’s abolitionist arguments in her “Reply” with the rhetorical strategies developed by some of the escaped slaves who composed narrative exposés of slavery (Douglass, Jacobs, or Craft, for example). Where does Child use strategies similar to those of the ex-slaves? How is her appeal to her readers different? How does her position as a non-slave and a white woman affect her appeal?

Exploration: “Mrs. Child’s Reply” is part of a series of letters that

Child exchanged with Governor Wise and Mrs. Mason of Virginia over the specific issue of John Brown's raid and the general question of the morality of slavery. Child's subsequent publication of the letters in pamphlet form was a great success. Why do you think Child decided to publish her argument in the form of letters between disputants rather than as a series of essays? Why do you think the collection of letters was popular with northern readers? How does Child's use of letters compare to later publications of letters, such as Amelia Clappe's "Shirley Letters"?

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865)

Born to impoverished parents in backwoods Kentucky, Abraham Lincoln rose to become the sixteenth president of the United States. His remarkable story of success, his achievements in guiding the country through the Civil War, and his tragic death have afforded him iconic stature within the annals of American history and made him a hero to many. Lincoln had little formal schooling and was mostly self-educated, eventually training himself in the law. After setting up a successful legal practice in Illinois, he became interested in politics and was elected first to the state legislature and later to the U.S. Congress in 1846.

Lincoln's election to the presidency was the result of the complicated American political situation of the 1840s and 1850s, centered on the divisive issue of slavery. While Lincoln is often celebrated for his decision to free the slaves, he in fact came to his commitment to total emancipation only by degrees. Never an actual supporter of slavery, he was still somewhat ambivalent about its place within the country through much of his career: he fought to ban it from the western territories and new states but was reluctant to advocate abolition within the South itself. Lincoln's primary commitment was always to the preservation of the Union, and he was willing to reject abolitionist measures if they seemed to threaten that goal. Despite his attempts to seem flexible and moderate on the issue of slavery, however, his election to the presidency in 1860 polarized the nation. Seven southern states immediately seceded to form the Confederacy. Within a month of Lincoln's inauguration, the Civil War had begun. By 1863, Lincoln was ready to adopt a more radical position and signed the Emancipation Proclamation, finally committing the Union to the total abolition of slavery.

Lincoln's extraordinary skills as a writer and orator were crucial to his political successes and his ability to lead the country effectively through the war. In the early speeches of his career, he worked to connect with the "common man" in the audience, employing a clear, almost legalistic, logic and a satirical sense of humor. As he grew in confidence as a statesman, his speeches retained their clarity but became more powerful and resonant, often drawing upon biblical references and even the cadences of biblical prose. By turning to



[3228] Timothy O'Sullivan, *Incidents of the War. A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, July, 1863*, courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-B8184-7964-A DLC].

LINCOLN WEB ARCHIVE

[1708] Brady National Photographic Art Gallery, *Abraham Lincoln* (1864), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-B816-1321]. This portrait photograph from January 1864, between the Gettysburg address and the second inaugural address, resembles most memorial images.

[1803] Abraham Lincoln, *Emancipation Proclamation* (1863), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. This 1863 proclamation emancipated slaves held in areas in rebellion against the United States, but not those in Union-controlled areas.

[3228] Timothy O’Sullivan, *Incidents of the War. A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, July, 1863*, courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-B8184-7964-A DLC]. Dead Federal soldiers on the battlefield at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Graphic war photographs like this one inspired postwar literary realism.

[7163] Esther Buble, *Inside the Lincoln Memorial* (1943), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USW3-040346-D]. After his assassination, Abraham Lincoln’s image became iconic in the North and among African Americans, through ceremonies, popular songs and prints, statuary, and poetry such as Walt Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.”

Christian rhetoric, Lincoln tried to unite the bitterly divided American populace and to garner popular support for a war that turned out to be longer and bloodier than anyone had anticipated. Since Lincoln’s tragic assassination one month into his second term in office in 1865, his speeches have come to be revered as enduring expressions of formative American cultural ideals.

TEACHING TIPS

■ In order to appreciate the significance of Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” students should have some background on the battle of Gettysburg. Fought in early July 1863, Gettysburg was the bloodiest battle of the Civil War, with a total of 51,000 casualties—more men died at Gettysburg than in any other battle on North American soil before or since. Gettysburg marked an important turning point in the Civil War; the Confederate Army never recovered from the heavy losses it suffered there. After giving students this background, ask them to think about how Lincoln grapples with the scope and nature of Gettysburg as a national tragedy in his address. You might have them consider how this speech compares with other presidential speeches following catastrophic events (such as Franklin Roosevelt’s Pearl Harbor speech, or George W. Bush’s responses to September 11, 2001).

■ Ask students to pay attention to the changes in Lincoln’s rhetorical treatment of slavery between the “House Divided” speech (1858) and the “Second Inaugural” (1865). While the earlier speech is a rigorously logical, legalistic argument for keeping slavery out of the West, the “Second Inaugural” claims that slavery is an evil in the eyes of God and that the emancipation of the slaves was wrought by divine will. Ask students which speech they find more powerful or persuasive. Ask them to consider the different historical circumstances in which these two speeches were composed.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What kind of audience does Lincoln assume will be listening to his speeches? How do you think nineteenth-century audiences might have been different from audiences today?

Context: Why do you think Lincoln chose the verse from the New Testament “A house divided upon itself cannot stand” (Luke 11.17) as the basis for his speech? What significance would this image of a threatened home have for nineteenth-century Americans? How might it have resonated with American ideals of domesticity?

Context: Interestingly, Lincoln’s now celebrated speech was not well received when he first delivered it on the battlefield at Gettysburg in November 1863. Apparently, it seemed too concise and simple to the audience, which preferred Edward Everett’s lengthy two-hour sermon. Why do you think the speech was unsuccessful when Lincoln delivered it? Today the “Gettysburg Address” is often viewed as a model of eloquence. Why has it gained in popularity over time?

Exploration: Today Lincoln is something of an American cultural icon—he is the subject of imposing monuments and his face even circulates on our money. What does Lincoln represent to contemporary Americans? Why is he viewed as such an important president? How does Lincoln’s position within American cultural mythology compare to what you know about his biography and political choices? What kinds of myths are important to Lincoln’s image?

Exploration: The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., is based upon one of the most famous architectural monuments in the world, the temple to Athena found on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Why would the architects of the Lincoln Memorial want to use the Parthenon as a model? What does this allusion signify about Lincoln and about America? What does it mean that inside we find Lincoln seated rather than the gold and ivory statue of Athena?

Exploration: Read “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” Walt Whitman’s elegy for Lincoln. What does Whitman admire about Lincoln? Do Lincoln’s speeches live up to this eulogy?

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896)

Harriet Beecher Stowe was born into a large New England religious family. Her father, Lyman Beecher, was a prominent Evangelical Calvinist minister, and her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, followed in their father’s footsteps to become one of the best-known preachers in the country. Stowe’s oldest sister, Catharine Beecher, ran a succession of girls’ schools and gained national recognition for her theories of education, health, and domestic economy. When the family moved west to Cincinnati in 1832, the Beecher sisters founded a new religious school for young women. Because Ohio was a border state between North and South, Stowe met fugitive slaves and encountered fierce debates over slavery while she lived there, ultimately leading her to adopt the abolitionist cause.

In 1836, Harriet Beecher married Calvin Stowe, a widower and professor of biblical studies at a seminary in Cincinnati. She soon found herself overwhelmed by domestic concerns, raising seven children and managing a large household on a professor’s small salary. To supplement the family’s finances, Stowe published stories and sketches in magazines. In 1850, the Stoves moved back to New England when Calvin Stowe accepted a teaching job first in Maine and later in Massachusetts. Stowe’s commitment to the abolitionist cause remained fierce, and, spurred by her outrage at the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, she resolved to “write something that will make the whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is.” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* appeared in 1851 in serial form in the weekly anti-slavery journal *The National Era*. It was published as a book the following year.

Although Stowe had set out to “make the whole nation feel” the horrors and injustice of slavery, she could not have anticipated the enormous and unprecedented impact her novel would have on the national psyche. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* sold over 350,000 copies in its first



[1328] A. S. Seer, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1879), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-13513].

year of publication, and only the Bible sold more copies in the United States during the nineteenth century. The novel appealed to a wide audience by drawing upon mainstream religious and cultural beliefs: Stowe mobilized evangelical doctrine and the ideal of domesticity to argue that slavery was both un-Christian and destructive to family life. Above all, Stowe intended to convince the nation that slavery was a sin that harmed both slaves and the souls of slave owners. By treating human beings as property that could be bought and sold, slavery separated husbands and wives and parents and children, thus standing in opposition to both familial and Christian love. Using sentimental rhetoric and melodramatic situations, and writing in clear, accessible language, Stowe appealed to her culture's investment in the sacredness of home, family, and Christian salvation. The strategy was effective; when she visited the White House in 1862, President Lincoln is said to have remarked, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this big war."

Whether or not *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was responsible for the Civil War, there is no denying that it brought slavery to the forefront of American consciousness. The novel has caused controversy since its publication, when southerners attempted to ban it and some northerners viewed it as inflammatory. In the twentieth century, the literary establishment has criticized *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its unsophisticated sentimentality and emotionalism, its reliance on offensive racial stereotypes, its reinforcement of traditional gender roles, and its colonialist project of forming a separate state for free blacks in Africa. However out of touch the book is with contemporary values, Stowe's unparalleled ability to move readers—and effect social change—remains a testament to the power and importance of her first novel.

Uncle Tom's Cabin not only made Stowe famous, but also brought her enough wealth to free her from economic and domestic cares. She continued writing through the nineteenth century, producing many more novels and serving as an influential spokesperson on national affairs, literature, spirituality, and domestic practices.

TEACHING TIPS

■ For most of the twentieth century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not considered an American literary classic. Because it is openly sentimental (that is, designed to appeal to the emotions) and lacks the formal complexity that is usually associated with literary merit, critics largely dismissed the novel as "propaganda" or "melodrama." But reassessment from feminist scholars like Jane Tompkins and Gillian Brown has changed the novel's place in the American canon. For this reason, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a great starting point for a discussion of literary values and the way the texts we read in college classes are selected and evaluated. Ask students to consider what constitutes a "classic" or a "masterpiece." What values underwrite these aesthetic judgments? How and why have our standards for the canon changed over time?

■ Many of Stowe's characters have taken on a life of their own in

the American popular imagination. Ask students what springs to mind when they think of “Uncle Tom,” “Simon Legree,” “Little Eva,” and “Poor Eliza.” As a class, you can interrogate the racial and gender stereotypes conjured up by these familiar characters. Ask students to consider why these characters have found such a prominent place in American culture and how ideas about them have changed over time. You might show them the “Uncle Tom’s Cabin ballet” scene in *The King and I* or some of the mass-produced trinkets and commodities emblazoned with “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” images.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: How does Stowe use racial and gender stereotypes in her characterization of Uncle Tom, Topsy, Little Eva, Eliza, George, and Simon Legree? Do any of these characters challenge common stereotypes? How?

Comprehension: Sometimes Stowe as the narrator of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* will address her audience directly as “you” and “dear reader.” What is the effect of these direct appeals from the writer to the reader? Why do you think Stowe uses this technique?

Context: Compare Stowe’s portraits of black women’s sufferings in slavery (Eliza, Cassy, Emmeline) with Jacobs’s account of her real-life experiences. How does Jacobs’s narrative draw on some of the same sentimental conventions Stowe uses in her novel? How is Jacobs’s story different?

Context: Stowe closes her novel by urging that all her readers involve themselves in the struggle against slavery: “There is one thing that every individual can do—they can see to it that *they feel right*. An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who *feels* strongly . . . is a constant benefactor to the human race.” What do you think Stowe means by “feeling right”? What kind of audience is she appealing to? Do you think her strategy is effective?

Exploration: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* achieves powerful results by allying a discourse of domesticity and sentimentality with a call for social reform. How does Stowe’s formula influence later American literature? Can you think of other novels that adopt similar strategies?

Exploration: One of the most famous covers of an edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reworks Edward Hicks’s famous painting *A Peaceable Kingdom*. Examine both the original painting and the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* version. How does the painting for the cover of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* revise the original image? What aspects of *A Peaceable Kingdom* would have made it an appealing image to the creator of the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* cover?

Harriet Jacobs (c. 1813–1897)

Born into slavery in North Carolina, Harriet Ann Jacobs was raised both by her free black grandmother and by a white mistress who taught her to read. Upon her mistress’s death, Jacobs was willed to

STOWE WEB ARCHIVE

[1328] A. S. Seer, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1879), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-13513]. Situated squarely within the sentimental tradition, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* unabashedly appeals to readers’ emotions with scenes of pathos and tragedy. Though the novel seems melodramatic and even derogatory to modern readers, Stowe provided the sentimental appeal necessary to bring the abolitionist cause to the forefront of American consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century.

[2644] Edward Hicks, *Peaceable Kingdom* (c. 1834), courtesy of National Gallery of Art, 1980.62.15. Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. Hicks’s Quaker biblical allegory alludes to William Penn’s treaty with the Lenni Lenape Indians and influenced African American artist Robert Duncanson’s painting of Little Eva and Uncle Tom, characters from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In these works, sentimentality obscured the tension between peace ideals and anti-slavery ideals.

[3457] Anonymous, *Harriet Beecher Stowe* (c. 1880), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration [208-N-25004]. Although *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* dates from 1851, Stowe remained active for decades, composing both early New England regionalist literature and works dealing with how middle-class women’s household work was changing in an industrializing society.

[5460] Courier Litho. Co., *Uncle Tom’s Cabin—On the Levee* (1899), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Theatrical Poster Collection. This poster for a theater production shows happy slaves dancing. Post-Civil War “Uncle Tom Shows” often were performed by whites in blackface. By presenting blacks as subservient in every way, such shows gave the term “Uncle Tom” its derogatory meaning.

[7221] Nina Baym, Interview: “The Publication Success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Baym, professor of English at the University of Illinois, is the general editor of *The Norton Anthology*

of *American Literature* and author of *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation*.



[6832] Sandy Point Plantation, Edenton, North Carolina (1933–40), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS, NC21-EDET.V,3-1].

Mary Matilda Norcom and sent to live in her household. Mary's father, the prominent physician Dr. James Norcom, soon began making unwelcome sexual advances toward Jacobs, preying on her vulnerability as a slave. Rather than submit to her master, Jacobs chose to become involved with Samuel Sawyer, a white, slave-holding neighbor, with whom she had two children. In 1835, Dr. Norcom, angry at what he viewed as Jacobs's offenses against him, separated her from her children and sent her to work on a plantation in nearby Auburn. Jacobs soon escaped from the plantation but was unable to flee North Carolina. Instead, she was forced to hide in a cramped attic crawlspace in her grandmother's house for nearly seven years, keeping secret watch over her children. In 1842, Jacobs finally managed to escape to the North. Once there, she arranged for her children's escape as well.

In New York, Jacobs worked as a nursemaid in the home of the popular writer and editor Nathaniel Parker Willis. In 1849, she moved to Rochester to work in the Anti-Slavery Reading Room, where she got to know many prominent abolitionists (including Frederick Douglass) and familiarized herself with anti-slavery literature and feminism in the process. Jacobs eventually determined that she should publicize her own story of exploitation and escape in order to raise public awareness about the condition of women held in slavery. She initially approached Harriet Beecher Stowe, the celebrated author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, about writing her narrative, but ultimately Jacobs decided to compose her history herself. Adopting the pseudonym "Linda Brent" and disguising the names of the other characters in her story, she used her autobiographical narrative to reflect on the sexual harassment and psychological abuse that were so often the lot of the female slave. Because the book departed from the conventions of male-centered slave narratives and also challenged genteel notions of propriety by focusing on issues of sexuality, Jacobs found it difficult to find a publisher. Finally, a Boston firm agreed to publish the manuscript provided Jacobs could get Lydia Maria Child to write an introduction and act as editor. Child agreed to the project and, with the help of her introduction and minor editorial contributions, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was published in 1861.

Jacobs's history is unique among slave narratives for its focus on the experiences of women, its treatment of sexual exploitation, its emphasis on family life and maternal values, and its self-conscious appeal to an audience of white, female readers. *Incidents* draws on the conventions of both seduction novels and domestic fiction—two popular eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sentimental literary forms. The book recounts Jacobs's efforts to maintain her virtue against her master's attempted seduction and celebrates family relationships and domestic ideals of femininity. Jacobs's deployment of sentimental discourse also works to problematize nineteenth-century notions of proper womanhood and exposes the extent to which such ideals were dependent upon economic and racial distinctions. As her story makes clear, the pressures and abuses enslaved black women faced could make it impossible for them to uphold bourgeois standards of virginity and motherhood. Relegated to the status of property, Jacobs faced

an enormous struggle in her attempts to control her own sexuality, home life, and family relationships.

Jacobs was finally freed from slavery in 1853, when her New York employer's wife, Cornelia Willis, bought her from the Norcom family for three hundred dollars and then emancipated her. In her narrative, Jacobs notes both her gratitude to her employer and her discomfort with being purchased. Making use of her freedom, she remained active in the anti-slavery cause and did relief work among black refugees from the South during and after the Civil War. Jacobs died while living with her daughter in Washington, D.C.

TEACHING TIPS

■ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* did not receive a great deal of critical attention until the late twentieth century, mostly because modern scholars had doubts about its authenticity and the conditions of its authorship. For many years, the book was understood to be a novel written in the guise of a slave narrative or an embellished slave autobiography ghost-written by a white author. Critics often assumed that Lydia Maria Child had composed the narrative, even though she insists in her introduction that her editorial work was limited to “condensation and orderly arrangement.” Through extensive research, Jean Fagan Yellin finally offered conclusive proof of Jacobs's authorship of *Incidents* and the authenticity of the events described in the text. Yellin's 1981 edition of Jacobs's work alerted scholars to its importance and transformed its position within the canon. Once you have provided students with this background information, ask them to consider why Jacobs's authorship was questioned for so long. Why would scholars have found it so difficult to believe that a black woman raised in slavery could have written this book? What qualities make the narrative seem fictional?

■ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* closes with Jacobs's reflections on the state of her domestic life after freedom: “Reader, my story ends with freedom; not, in the usual way, with marriage. . . . The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble. I wish it for my children's sake far more than for my own.” Here, the narrative is clearly appealing to a readership of free, white women who would sympathize with this yearning for domestic stability, for “home and hearth.” At the same time, this passage challenges the conventions of sentimental discourse by juxtaposing “freedom” and “marriage” in complex ways, both exposing domestic ideals as available only to the privileged and hinting that freedom is perhaps a preferable alternative to the patriarchal institution of marriage. You might use this passage to initiate a discussion of Jacobs's appropriations and revisions of the nineteenth-century ideology of domesticity and sentimentality.

JACOBS WEB ARCHIVE

[1055] W. M. Merrick, Map of the Washington and Alexandria Railroad (1865), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. This period map of Washington, DC, shows how the city looked at the end of the Civil War.

[6442] Keith White, *Harriet Jacobs* (1994), courtesy of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History. A rendering of the only known photograph of Harriet Jacobs. Jacobs's account of her sexual exploitation as a slave opened her up to attacks on her morality. This led her to publish under the pseudonym Linda Brent and may have led her to avoid being photographed.

[6832] Sandy Point Plantation, Edenton, North Carolina (1933–40), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS, NC21-EDET.V.3-1]. This nineteenth-century southern home is similar in style to the house of Harriet Jacobs's owner, Dr. James Norcom. Well-to-do slave-owning whites who were not part of the wealthiest planter class often built such houses.

[7223] Nina Baym, Interview: "Gender and Sexual Difference" (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Baym, professor of English at the University of Illinois, is the general editor of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* and author of *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation*.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What strategies does Jacobs adopt in her efforts to resist her master? How does she assert her rights over her own body and her children? How does she deal with the racism she encounters once she has escaped to the North?

Comprehension: How do Jacobs's relationships with family members and her children influence the decisions she makes?

Comprehension: Draw a diagram of the attic Jacobs hid in for seven years. How does your picture compare to Jacobs's description of the "loophole" in which she lived? What kinds of physical and emotional challenges would living in such enclosed quarters pose for an individual?

Context: How does *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* compare to Frederick Douglass's narrative? What goals, values, and strategies do Jacobs and Douglass have in common? In what respects do they differ?

Context: How does Jacobs's text both appropriate and challenge conventions of domesticity and white ideals of femininity? What techniques does she adopt from sentimental novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? How does her text implicitly critique domestic ideals?

Exploration: Until the early 1980s, many scholars believed that Jacobs's narrative was a fictional rather than an autobiographical account (a theory that has subsequently been dismissed after conclusive evidence documenting Jacobs's life came to light). Why do you think critics read this text as a novel? How does it participate in novelistic conventions? How does our understanding of the text change once we know that it was really "written by herself," as the subtitle claims?

Frederick Douglass (1818–1895)

Frederick Douglass was one of the most influential African American thinkers of his day, in spite of his inauspicious beginnings. He was born into slavery on a plantation in Maryland, where he was called Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. Douglass always suspected that his father was his mother's white owner, Captain Aaron Anthony. He spent his early childhood in privation on the plantation, then was sent to work as a house slave for the Auld family in Baltimore. There he came in contact with printed literature and quickly realized the relationship between literacy and personal freedom. With help from Mrs. Auld, Douglass learned how to read and write. In 1833, the Aulds sent him back to the plantation, where he soon acquired a reputation for resistance and insubordination. In an effort to make him more submissive, Douglass's owner sent him to Edward Covey, a "slave breaker" paid to discipline and train disobedient slaves. Instead of cowing Douglass, the experience with Covey only strengthened Douglass's resolve to acquire his freedom. Douglass was eventually sent back to Baltimore, where he learned the trade of ship caulking and achieved partial freedom by hiring himself out for work and paying a weekly fee to his owner. In 1838, Douglass escaped to the

North with financial and emotional support from Anna Murray, a free black woman he had met in Baltimore. The two married in New York and then moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where they adopted a new surname, “Douglass.”

In 1839, Douglass bought his first copy of *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison’s radical abolitionist newspaper. He soon became involved in Garrison’s abolitionist circle and emerged as an eloquent speaker for the cause of African American rights, addressing audiences all over the country with moving accounts of his experiences as a slave. In 1845, he published his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* both to disseminate his story to a wide audience and to quell public doubts about the authenticity of his past as a slave. The book, an outstanding example of the **slave narrative** genre, was a bestseller both in the United States and abroad, catapulting Douglass to celebrity and making him an international leader in the anti-slavery fight.

Eventually, Douglass broke with Garrison because they disagreed about how best to achieve abolitionist goals. While Garrison disavowed the United States Constitution as a pro-slavery document and advocated only passive resistance, Douglass was becoming increasingly committed to working within electoral politics and to adopting active—and if necessary violent—strategies to ensure emancipation. Douglass moved to Rochester, New York, in 1847 to establish an abolitionist newspaper for the African American population, *The North Star* (later renamed *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*). During the Civil War, he worked tirelessly for black rights and was instrumental in convincing Lincoln to enlist African Americans in the Union army. After the war, he held a variety of posts in the government and remained a prominent champion of not only African American rights but also all human rights, including women’s suffrage. He revised his autobiography twice, publishing *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855 and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* in 1881.

Douglass’s original *Narrative* was a groundbreaking work of autobiography, setting the standard for many subsequent slave narratives in its eloquent articulation of a man’s achievement of selfhood. Douglass powerfully appropriates the language and conventions of white middle-class American culture to condemn slavery and racism. Drawing on foundational republican ideals of human freedom and equality, he denounces the cruel contradictions and hypocrisies in American culture even as he affirms his hope for its future.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Douglass represents his violent physical encounter with Covey, the “slave breaker,” as a crucial turning point in his journey toward independence and freedom—in his words, it is the moment “a slave was made a man.” Ask students to analyze the importance of this passage. What are the implications of Douglass’s physical assertion of strength and its resulting empowerment? You might ask them to consider how the episode compares to Tom’s passive capitulation to



[6831] Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany, *The North Star* [banner] (1848), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Serial and Government Publications Division.

DOUGLASS WEB ARCHIVE

[2534] Reuben Gilbert, *Declaration of Anti-Slavery Convention Assembled in Philadelphia, December 4, 1833* (1833), courtesy of the Library of Congress [Printed Ephemera Collection Portfolio 153, Folder 26]. The woodprint by R. S. Gilbert illustrates Psalm 91.13, “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.” Abolitionists used the Bible to emphasize the conflict between slavery and Christianity.

[2729] C. M. Battey, *Hon. Frederick Douglass. Orator, Statesman, Emancipator* [Photo Postcard] (n.d.), courtesy of C. M. Battey Photograph Collection, Photograph and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Photograph depicting Douglass as an elder statesman after the Civil War.

[3292] United States Constitution (1787), courtesy of the U.S. National Archives & Records Administration. Delegates met on May 14, 1787, to revise the Articles of Confederation, but instead created a new document, and a new government, one influenced by Greek democracy, the Roman Republic, and Native American (specifically Iroquois) forms of representation.

[3482] William Lloyd Garrison and Isaac Knapp, eds., *The Liberator* (May 21, 1831), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division. *The Liberator*, launched in 1831, called slavery a crime that should be ended immediately without compensation. Such radical abolitionism became identified with the paper's editor, William Lloyd Garrison.

[3538] Caleb Bingham, *The Columbian Orator . . . Calculated to Improve Youth and Others in the Ornamental and Useful Art of Eloquence* (1811), courtesy of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries. Frederick Douglass highlights Bingham's primer *The Columbian Orator* in describing his liberation through literacy. "Columbian" implies a distinctly American mode of rhetoric.

[3570] Anonymous, *Mrs. Auld Teaching Him to Read* (1892), courtesy of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries. This illustration from *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*, depicts the northern wife of Douglass's owner introducing Douglass to reading.

[5150] J. Sartain, from a painting by M. C. Torrey, *William Lloyd Garrison* (n.d.), courtesy of the National Parks Service, Frederick Douglass National Historical Site. Garrison helped found the American Anti-Slavery Society, supported immediate emancipation and the Underground Railroad, and sponsored Frederick Douglass.

[6831] Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany, *The North Star* [banner] (1848), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Serial and Government Publications Division. *The North Star* was an abolitionist newspaper published by prominent black intellectuals Douglass and Delany in Rochester, New York. Its name symbolized a guiding light to freedom; escaping southern slaves used the North Star to find their way to the free states or to Canada.

[7220] Frederick Douglass IV, "Reading from the Narrative: Detesting My Enslavers Through the Power of Learning to Read" (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Frederick Douglass IV is the great-great grandson of Frederick Douglass.

Simon Legree (another "slave breaker") in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to Lorenzo Asisara's account of his participation in an Indian revolt, and to Harriet Jacobs's account of the very different strategies she used to assert her independence.

■ As the *Narrative* makes clear, Douglass's achievement of literacy is a crucial step in his struggle for freedom. One of the texts he uses to learn to read is *The Columbian Orator*, a compendium of texts chosen for their evocation of American values. First published in 1797, *The Columbian Orator* was a mainstay of the American schoolroom through the nineteenth century. In it, Douglass would have encountered arguments for natural rights, human freedom, and even for emancipation (in this case, of Catholics). Ask students to consider the role of literacy in the *Narrative*. They might analyze Sophia Auld's dramatic shift in attitude toward teaching Douglass to read, Douglass's covert strategies for teaching himself, and his attempts to instruct other slaves in reading and writing. They might also look at the specific books Douglass mentions reading, such as *The Columbian Orator* and Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, to explore how these texts might have influenced Douglass's values and beliefs.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why does Douglass refuse to narrate the details of his escape in his 1845 autobiography? What effect does this gap in information, and the reason Douglass provides for it, have on his narrative?

Context: Before Douglass's violent encounter with Covey, he is given a root by his friend, the slave Sandy Jenkins. Sandy claims that the root is a kind of talisman that will protect anyone who carries it. Although Douglass represents himself as skeptical of Sandy's superstitious belief in the root's power, he does at some level validate the effectiveness of the talisman in the course of his narrative. What is the significance of this invocation of African American folk magic at this point in the narrative?

Context: How does Douglass describe Sorrow Songs in his *Narrative*? How do they affect him personally? What does he believe they signify in slave culture? What does he mean when he says that though they seem "unmeaning jargon," they are "full of meaning" for the slaves?

Exploration: Douglass's autobiographical account of the process through which a "slave was made a man" has often been compared to Benjamin Franklin's narrative of his own self-making. What do these autobiographies have in common? How do these two writers' approach to literacy and writing compare? How does Douglass recast Franklin's ideals to fit the condition of an escaped slave?

Lorenzo Asisara (b. 1819)

While the institution of slavery is generally associated with African Americans and with the antebellum South, it was in fact present in

other regions and at other times in American history. Lorenzo Asisara's story is an example of the enslavement of Native Americans in the American Southwest. Asisara was born into the Costanoan Indian community in the Mission at Santa Cruz. The Costanos, or "coastal people," were Native Americans who traditionally resided along the Pacific coast from the San Francisco area south to Monterey. In his narrative "Punishment" (located in the archive), Asisara provides a rare eyewitness account of life within the Spanish Franciscan mission system from a Native American perspective. Transcribed from oral testimony Asisara gave in 1877 in an interview with field historian Thomas Savage, "Punishment" is an unusual narrative of mission discipline, the decline of the Franciscan order in California, and the decimation of the local Native American population.

The Franciscan empire in California was the product of the Spanish colonial project in the New World. Catholic priests of the Franciscan order were sent to California to Christianize the local Native Americans, claiming their land and turning them into laborers for the missions in the process. Because Franciscan Christianization involved compelling the Indians to give up their lands, culture, native religious practices, and independence, it often could not be accomplished by voluntary conversion and instead necessitated the use of military force. Once the Native Americans were baptized at the missions they became unpaid laborers who were not free to leave—that is, they essentially became slaves. Between 1770 and 1834 over 90,000 California Indians (a third of the pre-contact population) were enslaved within the **Franciscan missions**. Rampant disease and high rates of mortality ravaged the mission Indian populations.

Understandably, many Indians resisted Spanish domination, and that resistance took a variety of forms. Some natives opted to sabotage the missions by laboring slowly and performing tasks poorly, while others resisted more actively by running away, assassinating priests, or even leading large-scale revolts. By the 1830s, the mission system had become untenable. The Mexican government passed a series of "secularization laws" designed to break up the Franciscan estates and distribute the property to surviving Native Americans. In practice, few Indians were granted land or resources from the missions because corrupt civil administrators plundered most of the wealth.

Lorenzo Asisara's narrative details the abuses of the priests at the Santa Cruz Mission, exposing their fraudulent financial dealings, sexual exploitation of mission Indians, and reliance on harsh physical punishments such as whipping and beating. "Punishment" also provides a unique first-hand account of a riot among young Indian men in defiance of Padre Ramon Olbes. Asisara's participation in this riot was not unprecedented within his family; in fact, his father, Venancio Llenco, also had a history of resisting Spanish domination, conspiring in the assassination of a priest in the Santa Cruz Mission in 1812.

Asisara was raised in the mission from birth, eventually serving as



[6856] *San Gabriel Mission (1832)*, courtesy of the California Historical Society.

ASISARA WEB ARCHIVE

[1279] Edward Vischer, *Indian Rancheria of José Antonio Venado, At San Luis Rey Mission, Near the Zanja. Caicha-Tribe, Quechumas* (1868), courtesy of the University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library. Made about a decade before the first recording of Asisara's testimony, this drawing illustrates the material circumstances of Native Americans on former California mission lands after secularization.

[1891] Rand McNally & Co., *New Enlarged Scale Railroad and County Map of California Showing Every Railroad Station and Office in the State* (1883), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division [LC Railroad Maps, 189]. Building railroads required extensive mapping of natural geographical features. Later maps such as this one showed industrial transportation and government communications outposts.

[5228] Anonymous, *Montgomery Street, San Francisco, 1852* (n.d.), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-55762]. Rapid, mainly white immigration during the Gold Rush brought California to statehood in 1850, as a "free state" that forbade slavery. Yet demand for land and forced labor caused genocidal-scale population decline among California Indians.

[6856] Anonymous, *San Gabriel Mission* (1832), courtesy of the California Historical Society. Missions often maintained large herds of cattle as a reliable source of meat.

[7048] Lorenzo Asisara, "Punishment" [Narrative By Lorenzo Asisara, Translated And Edited By Edward D. Castillo] (1877). Asisara's narrative details abuses by the priests at the Santa Cruz Mission, exposing their fraudulent financial dealings, sexual exploitation of mission Indians, and reliance on harsh physical punishments.

a sacristan, or assistant to the priests during church services. Once the mission was broken up, he married and found work as a shepherd and cattle herder. Widowed in 1845, he moved to Yerba Buena (San Francisco), where he was conscripted into the Mexican militia until Mexico surrendered California to the United States in 1846. Returning to Santa Cruz, Asisara joined his friend Jose Ricardo and moved onto a homestead that had been granted to the Indians upon the divestiture of the Santa Cruz Mission. In 1866, Asisara and Ricardo were driven off by whites anxious to claim possession of the land. Despite over fourteen years of service to the mission, Asisara received no lands or remuneration for his labor. He spent the rest of his life working as a ranch hand in Santa Cruz.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Students often believe that slavery in America was a phenomenon limited to the antebellum period in the South. In fact, African American slavery existed in the northern colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and many "indentured servants" throughout early America experienced slavery-like conditions. Asisara's narrative of the exploitation of Mission Indians in California should add another dimension to students' conceptions of the institution of slavery in America. Ask them to think about the similarities between the management of Franciscan missions and southern plantations. They might also consider why the stories of enslaved Mission Indians have historically received so little attention in American culture.

■ Have students read aloud Asisara's description of the riot that broke out when the Indians decided to defy Padre Olbes. How does the tension in the scene build? What touches off the riot? How does it escalate? Ask students to pay attention to Asisara's defense of the Indians' motivations in resisting Padre Olbes.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What kinds of abuses do Asisara and the other Mission Indians experience at the hands of the Franciscans? How do the Indians respond to these abuses? What sorts of strategies do they adopt to resist the Mission authorities and to improve their conditions?

Context: Compare Asisara's description of the riot in defiance of Padre Olbes with Frederick Douglass's account of his fight with Edward Covey. What similarities do you find between these two incidents of slave resistance? How are the incidents different? Does Asisara seem to acquire the same kind of self-confidence and sense of independence that Douglass does from his act of rebellion? Why or why not?

Exploration: Asisara's narrative implicitly critiques the piety and morality of the Catholic priests who enslaved California Indians under the pretext of converting them to Christianity. Can you think of other slave narratives that engage in similar critiques, calling the

religious pretensions of slaveholders into question? Why would this have been a popular and effective rhetorical strategy?

William and Ellen Craft (c. 1826–1897)

William and Ellen Craft's daring escape from slavery in 1848 made them famous throughout antebellum America, heroes in the eyes of abolitionists and criminals in the eyes of slavery supporters. The unusual circumstances of their flight to freedom were a major factor in their celebrity. Ellen, so light-skinned as to be nearly white, disguised herself in men's clothing and posed as a young white planter to effect her escape. Her husband, William, played the role of her slave. Together, they traveled from Georgia to Philadelphia by train and by boat, often staying in first-class accommodations and always directly under the noses of southern authorities. Americans everywhere were moved by their amazing story of boundary crossing, for the Crafts passed through not only the literal boundary that separated North from South, but also the social boundaries of race, class, and gender that divided the population of the United States.

At an early age, both William and Ellen witnessed the break-up of their families as a result of their enslavement. William's master sold his mother, father, brother, sister, and eventually William in order to pay off debts. Working for a variety of masters, William learned the craft of carpentry and labored in a cabinetmaker's shop. Ellen, born in 1826, was the daughter of Major James Smith, a wealthy white plantation owner, and Maria, his mulatto house slave. Major Smith's white wife, annoyed by the presence in her household of her husband's natural daughter by a slave, gave Ellen to her own daughter, Eliza, as a wedding present. At the age of eleven, Ellen was thus separated from her mother and sent to live in Macon, Georgia, as the slave of her white half-sister.

William and Ellen met in Macon in the early 1840s and married in 1846 in a slave ceremony that was not recognized as legal or binding in the southern states. Fearing the possibility of sale or separation, they decided not to have children while they were still enslaved. Instead, they formulated their bold escape plan, purchasing clothing for Ellen's disguise and asking their masters for a couple of days of vacation on the pretense of visiting friends and relatives. Since Ellen could not write (teaching slaves to read or write was a criminal offense in the South), she bound up her arm in a sling to discourage officials from asking her to sign documents. She also took the precaution of wearing a poultice on her face to disguise her femininity and to limit conversations with strangers. In this guise of a sickly white man accompanied by his slave, the couple took just four days to reach the North, where they were hidden by a Quaker family on a farm outside Philadelphia. A few weeks later, they moved on to the safer community of Boston.

In Boston, the Crafts were warmly received by abolitionists and by the free black community. They were invited to tour with noted abolitionist William Wells Brown, giving speeches and lectures on the



[6852] Anonymous, *Ellen Craft the Fugitive Slave* (1860), frontispiece of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, by William Craft.

nature and effects of slavery. Later, Brown would fictionalize their escape in *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853), one of the first novels by an African American. Eventually, William Craft established himself as a cabinetmaker, and Ellen found work as a seamstress. Their comfortable life in Boston came to an abrupt end, however, with the passage of the **Fugitive Slave Act of 1850**. Mandating that escaped slaves residing in the North had to be returned to their masters in the South, the law jeopardized William and Ellen's hard-earned freedom. When Ellen's former owner dispatched two slave-catchers to Boston to capture and return the fugitives, the city rallied to the Crafts' cause and drove the slave-catchers out of town. The incident left the Crafts feeling vulnerable, however, and they decided to immigrate to England where they could find safety and asylum.

In England, William and Ellen continued their work lecturing and speaking, profoundly influencing British attitudes toward slavery in the process. They also attended the Ockham school, an agricultural academy in Surrey, where they built on the education they had begun to acquire in Philadelphia and in Boston. While in England, the Crafts had four children and established themselves in business. Between 1862 and 1865, William planned and executed a series of journeys to Dahomey, Africa, to teach Christianity and agriculture to the Africans there, as well as to promote trade. The scheme was not entirely successful, leaving the Crafts deeply in debt.

Unemployed and in financial straits, the Crafts decided to return to the United States in 1869, after the conclusion of the Civil War. They purchased Hickory Hill, a plantation in Savannah, Georgia, hoping to run it as a cooperative managed by freed blacks. Reconstruction-era Georgia proved to be a hostile environment for their idealistic project; a band of angry whites burned down the plantation in 1870, entirely destroying the house, barn, and first planted crop. Still committed to their vision, the Crafts refused to give up. In 1871, they took a lease on Woodville, a plantation outside of Savannah in a county where the majority of the population was black, and opened a school and cooperative farm there. Though they never again had to contend with the kind of overt violence they had encountered at Hickory Hill, they were dogged by perpetual hostility, discrimination, and debt for the remainder of their lives.

Today William and Ellen Craft are remembered primarily for their extraordinary escape from slavery and for William's gripping narrative of that escape. Published in 1860 in England, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* was an immediate hit, going through two editions in two years. The narrative offers important testimony about the harshness of slavery, while also challenging common antebellum notions of race, class, and gender.

TEACHING TIPS

■ William is careful to insist that Ellen was reluctant to cross-dress: "My wife had no ambition whatever to assume this disguise, and would not have done so had it been possible to have obtained our lib-

erty by more simple means.” While he ironically refers to Ellen as “my master” throughout the narrative, he also highlights moments when she “breaks character” and behaves in a stereotypically feminine manner, acting “nervous and timid,” “shrinking back” at crucial moments, and bursting into “violent sobs.” Ask students to consider why William might have been invested in asserting his wife’s normative femininity in this way. What kinds of tensions does her assumption of male clothing introduce into the narrative? What kinds of challenges does her “masculine” role pose for William as both her husband and the narrator of their story?

■ Although other abolitionists printed versions of the Crafts’ story, William Craft did not publish his own narrative until 1860, twelve years after their escape. Many critics speculate that Craft waited so long because he wanted to write with complete independence—that is, without the aid of a white ghost-writer or editor—and needed to acquire literary skills in order to do so. Once you have provided students with this background information, ask them to think about the role of literacy in the narrative. Ellen’s inability to write is figured as an important issue, and the Crafts’ reading and writing lessons with the Quaker family in Philadelphia function as an important turning point in their quest for freedom. How are literacy and freedom bound together? What does literacy have to do with identity for the Crafts? How does the Crafts’ attitude toward literacy compare to Frederick Douglass’s?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What kinds of boundaries, both literal and symbolic, do the Crafts cross in the course of their escape? Which boundaries do they seem to have the most difficulty crossing?

Context: How does Ellen Craft’s story compare with the “tragic mulatta” figure as she is characterized in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*? How does Ellen Craft’s use of cross-dressing compare to Harriet Jacobs’s use of cross-dressing in her escape? How does Craft’s decision to “pass” for white complicate her narrative?

Exploration: Cross-dressing was a popular motif in early national literature (a famous example is the narrative of Deborah Sampson, who served as a soldier in the Revolutionary War). Can you think of other American texts that involve stories of cross-dressing or racial passing? How do these acts of disguise take on different meanings over time? How do they challenge our assumptions about race and gender?

Exploration: Feminist and queer theorist Marjorie Garber has argued that cross-dressing is usually a sign of “category crisis” in a text. That is, it points to the artificiality of other socially constructed categories such as race, class, or sexuality. What categories besides gender are “in crisis” in the Crafts’ narrative?

CRAFT WEB ARCHIVE

[6828] Anonymous, *The Death of Clotel* (1853), courtesy of William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853). One of the first published novels by an African American, *Clotel* told the story of a slave daughter of Thomas Jefferson and contained Brown’s own personal slave narrative, as well as a fictionalized version of William and Ellen Craft’s story.

[6852] Anonymous, *Ellen Craft the Fugitive Slave* (1860), frontispiece of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, by William Craft. The light-skinned Ellen Craft escaped from slavery with her husband, William, by posing as a white man and her husband’s master, symbolizing how slavery and resistance disrupted the “normal” social order.

[6876] Anonymous, *William Craft* (1879), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division. This illustration from William Still’s *The Underground Railroad* shows a dignified Craft in respectable middle-class dress, contrasting with the appearance he needed to escape from slavery.

[6877] Anonymous, *Ellen Craft* (1879), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division. In this portrait published in William Still’s *The Underground Railroad*, Craft is shown in conservative female dress and with her light skin.

[7846] William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860). Excerpts from Craft’s slave narrative. William and Ellen Craft are remembered primarily for this gripping narrative of their extraordinary escape from slavery. Published in 1860 in England, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* was an immediate bestseller, going through two editions in two years.

Helen Hunt Jackson (1830–1885)

A committed activist for Native American rights, Helen Hunt Jackson provides an important context for understanding Indian slavery and exploitation in the California region. Born Helen Maria Fiske to strict, Calvinist parents and orphaned in her teens, Jackson was raised and educated in female boarding schools in Massachusetts and New York. In 1852 she married Edward Bissell Hunt of the politically and socially prominent Hunt family of New York. Edward was a career officer in the U.S. engineer corps, so the couple moved around a great deal as a result of his army postings. In 1854, the Hunts' first child died at the age of eleven months from a brain tumor. In 1863, after serving in the Civil War, Edward was killed while experimenting with a submarine explosive device. Two years later, the Hunts' only surviving child died of diphtheria. Devastated by these family tragedies, Jackson moved in 1866 to Newport, Rhode Island, to rest and recuperate. There she cultivated a literary circle of friends and found encouragement to produce her own creative work. Her first poems, about motherhood and the loss of her son, were favorably received and found a large audience. For Jackson, writing soon became both a passion and a profitable way to make a living. She was extremely prolific, producing hundreds of poems, essays, stories, book reviews, articles, and travel sketches for the leading periodicals of the day.

In 1873, poor health and respiratory problems prompted Jackson to move to Colorado Springs, where she believed the mountain air would cure her. She soon met and married William Sharpless Jackson, a Pennsylvania Quaker who had made his fortune as a banker in Colorado. Although her new husband was wealthy, Jackson continued to earn an independent living, publishing stories and travel sketches about life in the West.

In 1879, while she was visiting Boston, the course of her life and writing was forever changed when she attended a lecture given by Standing Bear, chief of the Ponca tribe, that detailed the abuses that his tribe had suffered at the hands of the U.S. government. Jackson was deeply moved by the Poncas' plight, declaring "I cannot think of anything else from morning to night." Although she had never identified herself with any of the prominent reform movements of the nineteenth century (such as abolitionism or women's suffrage), Jackson became committed to generating public support for Native American rights, devoting the remainder of her life to a crusade for justice for the Indians. In order to lend greater authority to her cause, she did exhaustive research in the Astor Library in New York, where she investigated documents related to United States Indian policy starting from the Revolutionary period. She gathered her findings together into a book, *A Century of Dishonor* (1881), narrating the history of cultural insensitivity, dishonest land dealings, and devastating violence that the American government had perpetrated upon various Indian tribes. Her work attracted the attention of President Chester Arthur, who appointed her a commissioner of Indian affairs among the Mission Indians of California.

Despite these successes, Jackson was frustrated by the slow pace of



[5244] Anonymous, *Ramona* (n.d.), courtesy of the San Diego Historical Society.

reform and the sense that her activism was having little effect on government policy. In 1884, she adopted a new strategy to promote Indian reform, deciding to write a novel that would engage the sympathies of white Americans. The result, *Ramona*, is a sentimental novel about a virtuous half-Indian, half-white woman and her Indian husband, harassed and downtrodden by racial bigotry and unjust Indian policies. *Ramona* was an immediate bestseller; the novel has gone through over three hundred printings since its initial publication and has been the subject of many plays, films, and pageants. It is Jackson's most popular work, and the piece for which she is best remembered. She died of cancer one year after the publication of *Ramona*.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Jackson consciously modeled *Ramona* after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; she hoped to “do one-hundredth part for the Indian as Mrs. Stowe did for the Negro” and later referred to herself as an “Indian Harriet Beecher Stowe.” Ask students to think about the relationship between the two novels and the similarities of their goals for social reform. Ask them to consider why Jackson would have chosen Stowe as a model when her crusade for Indian rights seemed to be stalling. You might also ask students to research what social reforms were enacted around the time of *Ramona's* publication. Ask them to consider why *Ramona* was not as effective a piece of social propaganda as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

■ *Ramona* depicts Spanish rule in California in romantic and nostalgic terms; it is mainly the encroaching white Americans who are characterized as greedy and cruel (perhaps to arouse the consciences of Jackson's white American readers). Ask students to think about Lorenzo Asisara's narrative of Indian life in the Spanish missions as they read *Ramona*. Ask them why Jackson would have ignored evidence that the Spanish system was often as unjust and exploitative as American policies were.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: How does *Ramona* challenge stereotypes nineteenth-century Americans held about Native Americans? About Spanish settlers in California? How does the novel play into common stereotypes?

Context: *Ramona* is portrayed as the product of two cultures: European and Native American. How does she compare with the figure of the “tragic mulatta” (see the “Beyond the Pale” extended context later in this unit)? How does the resolution of *Ramona's* fate at the end of the novel undercut the message of Indian equality and the call for reform?

Exploration: Like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Helen Hunt Jackson claimed that her social reform novel was the result of something akin to divine inspiration; she insisted, “I did not write *Ramona*. It was written *through* me.” What is at stake in this kind of denial of

JACKSON WEB ARCHIVE

[5237] Anonymous, *Helen Hunt Jackson, Young Girl* (1845), courtesy of Colorado College, Tutt Library Special Collections. Born in 1830 to strict, Calvinist parents, Helen Hunt Jackson was orphaned in her teens and educated in female boarding schools in Massachusetts and New York. Jackson is most famous for her work on behalf of Native Americans, including her books *A Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona*.

[5238] Anonymous, *Helen Hunt Jackson* (c. 1875), courtesy of Colorado College, Tutt Library Special Collections. At the time of this portrait, Helen Hunt was a vocal advocate for Native American rights. In 1882 she was appointed as a special commissioner for Indian affairs, the first woman to hold such a position.

[5240] Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona* manuscript page (c. 1883), courtesy of Colorado College, Tutt Library Special Collections. Helen Hunt Jackson hoped that *Ramona* would call attention to the mistreatment of California's Indians in the same way that Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had highlighted the plight of slaves.

[5244] Anonymous, *Ramona* (n.d.), courtesy of the San Diego Historical Society. Helen Hunt Jackson's novel *Ramona* explored prejudice, interracial marriage, and the injustices done to California Indians.

[7866] Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona: A Story* (1884), courtesy of the Reed College Library. *Ramona* is a sentimental novel about a virtuous half-Indian, half-white woman and her Indian husband, who are downtrodden by racism and unjust Indian policies. An immediate bestseller, *Ramona* has gone through over three hundred printings since its initial publication and has inspired many plays, films, and pageants.

authorship? Why might it have served Stowe's and Jackson's purposes? How might their status as women writers and social activists have informed their claims to divine inspiration?

Suggested Author Pairings

LYDIA MARIA CHILD, HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, AND HELEN HUNT JACKSON

Women writers who worked within the nineteenth-century tradition of sentimentality and domesticity, Child, Stowe, and Jackson were enormously successful in reaching female audiences and convincing them to support various kinds of social reform. Their effectiveness stemmed from a willingness to make overt appeals to their readers' emotional investments in the sanctity of home and family. While Child was more radical than either Stowe or Jackson (she supported the very controversial causes of women's suffrage, penal reform, and interracial marriage), she shared with them a tendency to rely on racist stereotypes in constructing her sentimental plots. Jackson worked later in the century than Child and Stowe—her efforts were focused exclusively on helping oppressed Native Americans in California—but she employed the same literary conventions. In fact, she consciously modeled *Ramona* on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, hoping to “do one-hundredth part for the Indian as Mrs. Stowe did for the Negro.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND SORROW SONGS

Lincoln's speeches and the Sorrow Songs developed by African Americans are the products of very different cultural formations and rhetorical traditions, yet both were intended for oral delivery. As spoken and sung texts, these works find their power in strategic repetition and in resonant imagery that is often drawn from the Bible. Lincoln's speeches and the Sorrow Songs make an interesting contrast because while the Sorrow Songs are the result of communal authorship and are constantly changing and evolving through improvisation, Lincoln's words are associated with his iconic persona and are unchanging (many of them, in fact, have actually been carved in stone).

BRITON HAMMON AND LORENZO ASISARA

Hammon's and Asisara's texts are both rather enigmatic since literary critics and historians know so little about the conditions and details of these men's lives. They are included in this module because their accounts touch so centrally on the issue of slavery, but neither manifests much self-consciousness about his own enslavement or the social institutions that oppress him. Both texts, too, are troubled by questions about their authorship and authenticity. Critics have debated whether Hammon composed his *Narrative* entirely on his own or whether he employed a white editor to write all or part of it. Asisara narrated his story to field historian Thomas Savage, who then wrote it

up in its current form. Thus, readers have no direct access to Asisara's original words and must read his history through the mediation of his editor.

WILLIAM CRAFT, FREDERICK DOUGLASS, AND HARRIET JACOBS

Craft, Douglass, and Jacobs all wrote within the popular nineteenth-century genre of the slave narrative. Tracing their literal and emotional journeys from slavery to freedom, these writers explore issues of self-determination and the formation of identity. Authors of slave narratives were primarily concerned with gaining adherents to abolitionism by convincing white audiences of their intelligence and humanity—and, by extension, the intelligence and humanity of all African Americans held in slavery. Craft, Douglass, and Jacobs all detail the degradations and abuses they suffered while enslaved, although these sufferings encompass very different experiences for each writer. Craft deals more thoroughly with the details of his escape than do Douglass and Jacobs, who were perhaps more concerned that offering too many details might lead to their being recaptured. Craft's narrative is also different in that it covers the escape of himself and his wife—their story is that of a couple rather than an individual—and addresses issues of racial passing. Jacobs's narrative makes an effective contrast to the narratives of Craft and Douglass because she offers a woman's perspective and is fundamentally concerned with the particular plight of female slaves.

CORE CONTEXTS

The Radical in the Kitchen: Women, Domesticity, and Social Reform

The lives of most middle-class white women in nineteenth-century America were structured by an ideology known as the "Cult of Domesticity," or the "**Cult of True Womanhood.**" This influential ideal of femininity stressed the importance of motherhood, homemaking, piety, and purity. While men were expected to work and act in the public realm of business and politics, women were to remain in the private, domestic sphere of the home. Charged with making the home a peaceful refuge of harmony and order—a haven from the stress of the competitive economic activity of the public domain—women were encouraged to eschew an interest in business or politics and devote themselves instead to the details of housekeeping and motherhood. Writers like Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Lydia Maria Child published manuals offering exhaustive guidelines on the proper maintenance of the American home, instructing their readers in everything from the appropriate dimensions of furniture to the correct way to launder dish towels. Fastidious housekeeping was not sim-



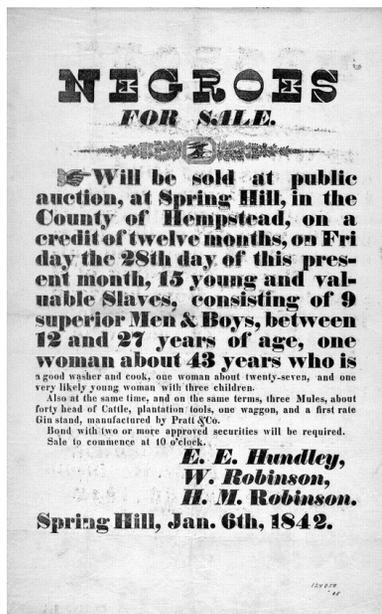
[5476] Anonymous, Cover illustration for *Authentic Anecdotes of American Slavery* by Mrs. L. M. Child (1838), courtesy of the Library of Congress, African American Pamphlet Collection.

ply a display of cleanliness or good taste; rather, a well-managed home was believed to foster good morals and Christian behavior in the people who resided within it. In tending their houses, then, women were understood to be tending the nation's morals. Nineteenth-century proponents of the Cult of True Womanhood believed that women possessed an inherent, natural capacity for sympathy, piety, and purity that made them uniquely fit to manage the domestic sphere.

While this domestic ideology might seem restrictive or even degrading by today's standards, it can also be understood as a method through which women asserted power in antebellum America. Rather than seeing their role as peripheral or trivial, some nineteenth-century women viewed their homemaking and child-rearing as almost revolutionary cultural work—they believed it would bring about the foundation of a new, harmonious, Christian society. In this light, it is telling that Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe prefaced their manual, *The American Woman's Home* (1869), "To the Women of America, in whose hands rest the real destinies of the republic." As critic Jane Tompkins points out, domestic ideology had far-reaching implications in its efforts to "relocate the center of power in American life, placing it not in the government, nor in the courts of law, nor in the factories, nor in the marketplace, but in the kitchen. And that means that the new society will not be controlled by men, but by women." This "culture of the kitchen" was a powerful force in antebellum America, saturating popular magazines, advice books, religious journals, newspapers, and sentimental literature.

Domestic ideology, with its insistence on Christian morals and the redemptive power of love, was often aligned with social reform movements aimed at saving or rehabilitating the downtrodden and oppressed. Penal reform, poverty relief, women's suffrage, and especially abolitionism were popular outlets for middle-class women's sympathy and energy. Viewing the buying and selling of children and adults as an outrageous affront to the sanctity of family relationships, proponents of domesticity designated slavery a kind of national domestic problem for white American women to manage and settle. Domestic objects such as aprons and pinholders printed with pictures of suffering slaves functioned to remind women of the brutality of slavery as they performed their domestic work, and thus aligned that work with sympathy for slaves.

Gillian Brown has noted that slavery was particularly horrifying for proponents of domesticity because it "disregards the opposition between the family at home and the exterior workplace. The distinction between work and family is eradicated in the slave, for whom there is no separation between economic and private status." As Harriet Jacobs makes clear in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, enslaved women could not live according to the ideology of "True Womanhood" because they could never be legally secure in marriage, motherhood, or home. Forced to labor for their white owners, they could not create private households of their own. Valued as chattel, they could be sold and separated from their children, husbands, and homes, as the advertisements from slave auctions featured in the



[6833] E. E. Hundley, W. Robinson, and H. M. Robinson, Slave Auction Broadside Advertisement, Arkansas (1842), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division [rbpe 00103300].

archive make vividly clear. Even the stereotypical figure of the African American “Mammy,” an icon of nurturing motherhood and domesticity, could never really be part of the “Cult of Domesticity” because her work was forced rather than freely given and performed for her owners rather than for her family.

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is a clear example of **domestic fiction**: it uses the ideology of domesticity to mobilize a searing and powerful attack on slavery. By focusing on the slave system’s destruction of families—both black and white—Stowe was able to portray slavery as a threat to the sanctity of the American home. Stowe’s novel found its power in emotionally charged images of motherhood: an early and often cited episode portrays Eliza Harris, her child in her arms, desperately running across ice floes on the Ohio River to prevent her son from being sold away from her. Stowe’s investment in the ideology of domesticity can be indexed by her reliance on descriptions of kitchens as a means to characterize the relative virtues of particular households in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In the St. Clair plantation, for example, the slave cook Dinah runs a disorganized and inefficient kitchen which “looked as if it had been arranged by a hurricane blowing through it.” According to Stowe’s logic, this badly managed kitchen is a direct reflection of the disorder and destructiveness caused by the slave system. Conversely, Rachel Halliday, the kindly Quaker woman who assists Eliza in her escape from slavery, keeps a perfectly ordered, welcoming kitchen in which every item of food seems imbued with a spirit of “motherliness and full-heartedness.” Rachel’s kitchen functions as the moral center of Stowe’s book, its harmony and warmth a perfect manifestation of maternal love and Christian salvation.

If *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* works by appealing to women’s capacity to “feel” and sympathize, it also depends on depicting African Americans as possessing the same qualities of sentimentality and docility that were supposed to characterize the domestic woman. Thus, we learn that Uncle Tom has the “gentle, domestic heart” that “has been a peculiar characteristic of his unhappy race,” and Stowe declares that African Americans “are not naturally daring and enterprising, but home-loving and affectionate.” In her attempts to align the plight of black slaves with the concerns of middle-class white women, then, Stowe ends up perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes. These problems certainly make the book less appealing to contemporary readers, but Stowe’s sentimentality—however essentializing and racist—was a powerful political strategy in its own time. So successful was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that Helen Hunt Jackson adopted the same formula over three decades later. Consciously modeling *Ramona* after Stowe’s novel, Jackson hoped to unleash the same kind of moral outrage and social protest against the enslavement of Native Americans in California.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Examine the announcements of slave sales featured in the archive, paying attention to the way the people for sale are

**“RADICAL IN THE
KITCHEN” WEB ARCHIVE**

[2498] Currier & Ives, *The Age of Brass, or The Triumphs of Women’s Rights* (1869), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC2-1921]. This depiction of women suffragettes voting shows a woman in pantaloons holding a sign reading, “Vote for the Celebrated Man Tamer” and another woman scolding a man holding a baby. With its reversal of public/private roles, this scene reverses the “Cult of True Womanhood” ideal.

[5313] Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Kitchen Design in the American Woman’s Home: Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (1869). This illustration shows the Beecher sisters’ interpretation of an efficient kitchen layout. Books and manuals on middle-class women’s roles in managing households were widely popular amid the Victorian era’s new technologies and economic relations.

[5476] Anonymous, Cover illustration for *Authentic Anecdotes of American Slavery* by Mrs. L. M. Child (1838), courtesy of the Library of Congress, African American Pamphlet Collection. A white female figure of Justice reaches down to uplift a supplicating enchained black female slave. The image affirms both common humanity and unequal status among women.

[6833] E. E. Hundley, W. Robinson, and H. M. Robinson, *Slave Auction Broadside Advertisement, Arkansas* (1842), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division [rbpe 00103300]. In this advertisement for an auction of enslaved men, women, and children, along with animals and tools, men are described by their age and women by their skills, attractiveness, and childbearing capacity.

described and catalogued. What qualities do slaveholders seem to value in slaves? What aspects of the slaves’ humanity are denied or ignored in the advertisements?

Comprehension: Look at *The American Woman’s Home’s* diagram of a model kitchen featured in the archive. What qualities do Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe seem to value in a kitchen? Why do you think the kitchen was such an important room for proponents of the Cult of Domesticity?

Comprehension: Examine the nineteenth-century images of motherhood featured in the archive. How are mothers portrayed? What seems to make a good mother?

Context: How does Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* participate in the tradition of domestic literature? To what extent does Jacobs idealize domesticity and traditional femininity? How does her narrative also work to critique these standards?

Context: Why do you think Abraham Lincoln chose the image of a “house divided” to characterize the problem of slavery in his speech of 1858? How would this metaphor have resonated with the domestic ideology of the period?

Context: In disguising herself as a man and escaping from slavery, Ellen Craft seems to transgress many of the ideals of “True Womanhood.” How does William Craft’s account of his wife in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* work to reinscribe her within the confines of domestic ideology?

Context: During the nineteenth century, aprons and pincushions printed with pictures of suffering slaves were popular with middle-class white women. Why do you think these domestic items were popular? What kind of relationship do these artifacts signal between the position of the domestic housewife and the plight of the slave?

Exploration: The racist, stereotypical image of the African American “Mammy” has been a stock character in everything from novels and films to the packaging of pancake mix. Why has this image been so frequently reproduced? What kind of fantasy about African American women is at stake in this image?

Exploration: Many of the assumptions and values that underwrote the existence of the Cult of Domesticity in the nineteenth century are no longer prevalent today. How have our values as a culture shifted? How have attitudes toward women, and women’s work, changed? Do you see any remnants of the Cult of Domesticity in contemporary culture?

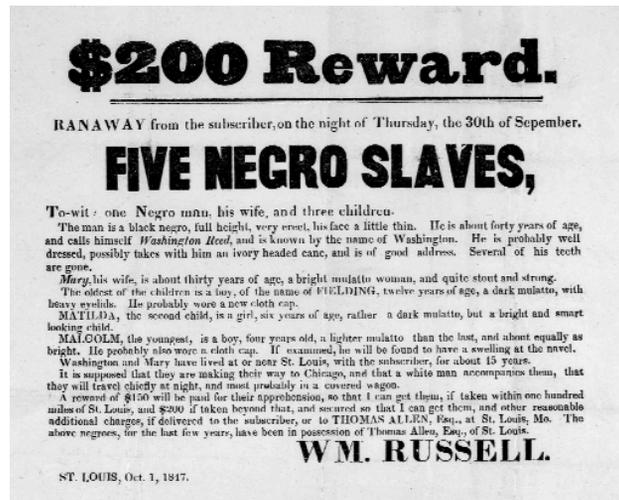
Exploration: In the twentieth century, critics did not generally view the sentimental or domestic novels of the nineteenth century as “literary classics,” yet they were extremely powerful and influential books in their own time. What makes a text a “classic”? Why were sentimental and domestic fiction excluded from the canon for so long? How do we determine what texts are studied in college classes?

Resistance, Rebellion, and Running Away: Acts of Defiance in Slave Culture

Many white slaveholders liked to think of their slaves as “happy” or “contented,” imagining that the slaves viewed the plantation as a family and the master as a benevolent father. But most slaves’ lives were far from comfortable: even owners who had a reputation for kindness used the whip; southern slave codes enabled masters to work slaves up to sixteen hours a day; and families were routinely separated when individual slaves were sold. Whatever image they chose to present to their white masters, enslaved African Americans had many strategies for registering their discontent, protesting their situation, and resisting the discipline of slave life.

Resistance could take subtle forms, such as performing assigned tasks slowly or poorly, breaking tools, or even singing songs that covertly mocked or criticized whites. Slaves could sabotage the efficiency of a plantation by stealing food that they would consume themselves, as well as commodities they could trade for money or other goods off the plantation. Resistance could take more violent forms, too. Some slaves set fire to houses, farm buildings, factories, and stores. Slaves who were pushed to their limits occasionally murdered their masters or overseers.

When a slave killed a white person, the incident tapped into slaveholders’ biggest fear: that the slaves would rise up and violently overthrow the system that oppressed them. Whites lived in terror that they would experience something like the violent slave revolt that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century in Haiti, which resulted in the overthrow of white rule and the establishment of an independent black republic there. Such large-scale revolts never took place in the American South, probably because the white population was large and had an entrenched system of domination, controlling all the resources and weapons. Still, some courageous and daring slaves did try to organize rebellions, though they rarely saw their plans to fruition. In 1800, Gabriel Prosser, a slave on a plantation near Richmond, Virginia, enlisted as many as a thousand other slaves in a plot to seize key points in the city and execute white slave owners. The conspirators were betrayed before their insurrection got underway, resulting in the execution of twenty-five slaves and the deportation of ten others to the West Indies. Similarly, Denmark Vesey’s plan to attack the white population of Charleston, seize ships in the harbor, and sail for Haiti was discovered before his operation could begin. Some historians believe that the uncovering of the Vesey plot, based primarily on rumors and the testimony of bullied and frightened slaves, really had more to do with white hysteria than with the existence of an actual conspiracy. Nonetheless, white authorities in Charleston executed thirty-five slaves as conspirators and deported thirty-four others.



\$200 Reward.

RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of Thursday, the 30th of September,

FIVE NEGRO SLAVES,

To-wit: one Negro man, his wife, and three children.

The man is a black negro, full height, very erect, his face a little thin. He is about forty years of age, and calls himself *Washington Reed*, and is known by the name of Washington. He is probably well dressed, possibly takes with him an ivory headed cane, and is of good address. Several of his teeth are gone.

Mary, his wife, is about thirty years of age, a bright mulatto woman, and quite stout and strong.

The oldest of the children is a boy, of the name of *FUELING*, twelve years of age, a dark mulatto, with heavy eyelids. He probably wore a new cloth cap.

MATHIAS, the second child, is a girl, six years of age, rather a dark mulatto, but a bright and smart looking child.

MALCOLM, the youngest, is a boy, four years old, a lighter mulatto than the last, and about equally as bright. He probably also wore a cloth cap. If examined, he will be found to have a swelling at the navel.

Washington and Mary have lived at or near St. Louis, with the subscriber, for about 15 years.

It is supposed that they are making their way to Chicago, and that a white man accompanies them, that they will travel chiefly at night, and most probably in a covered wagon.

A reward of \$150 will be paid for their apprehension, so that I can get them, if taken within one hundred miles of St. Louis, and \$200 if taken beyond that, and secured so that I can get them, and other reasonable additional charges, if delivered to the subscriber, or to *THOMAS ALLEN, Esq.*, at St. Louis, Mo. The above negroes, for the last few years, have been in possession of *Thomas Allen, Esq.*, of St. Louis.

W.M. RUSSELL.

ST. LOUIS, Oct. 1, 1847.

[5537] William Russell, Runaway Slave Advertisement (1847), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Printed Ephemera Collection.

At least two slave insurrections made it beyond the planning stage in the antebellum South. In 1811, a group of between three and five hundred slaves armed with farm implements marched on the city of New Orleans. They were quickly gunned down by militia and regular troops. The insurrection that attracted the most attention—and most frightened whites—was unquestionably Nat Turner’s revolt in 1831 in rural Virginia. Turner, a slave foreman and religious exhorter, believed he had a messianic calling from God to unite slaves in a rebellion against white authority. His revolt began when he and a small group of others killed the white people in his plantation household, then continued on to neighboring farmhouses where they recruited other slaves to join in. These slave rebels killed at least fifty-five whites before the militia put down the rebellion. Understandably, this insurrection left a lasting impression on white communities throughout the South, who feared uprisings among their own slaves. Although largely unsuccessful in achieving their goals of revolution and emancipation, slave revolts and conspiracies had profound effects on southern culture. They forced whites to acknowledge that their slaves were neither “happy” nor “contented,” but in fact had cause to rebel. And, as scholar Eugene Genovese comments, “they combated, in the most decisive way among both whites and blacks, the racist myth of black docility.”

If full-scale revolts were infrequent occurrences, a far more common act of defiance among slaves was the decision to run away. Some individuals and small groups slipped into the woods for short periods to protest plantation conditions, while others fled long distances to effect a permanent escape within the free states. Both kinds of fugitivism worked to undermine the slave system and assert African American bravery and independence. Running away became an increasingly difficult proposition over the course of the nineteenth century, since, in response to abolitionist activity, the slave states developed rigid laws and institutions to catch, punish, and return fugitives. Advertisements publicized detailed descriptions of runaways and offered rewards for their apprehension. Ferocious dogs and professional slave catchers tracked and captured runaways, often inflicting brutal (and sometimes fatal) injuries in the process. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made even the free territory of the northern states unsafe for escaped slaves; legally, they could be captured and returned to the South at any time without benefit of trial.

While many runaways braved these daunting impediments to successfully escape on their own, abolitionists and slaves also developed elaborate strategies like the famous **Underground Railroad** to aid fugitives. A system of concealed trails, hiding places, safe houses, and friendly supporters, the Underground Railroad helped spirit many escaped slaves to freedom, often in Canada. “Station masters” took enormous personal risks since providing aid to fugitive slaves was illegal. A few brave ex-slaves like Harriet Tubman even ventured back into slave states to assist runaways. Tubman made at least nineteen trips to the South to help organize escapes, reportedly using coded slave songs



[6585] Anonymous, *The Underground Railroad*, Charles T. Weber Painting (1893), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-28860].

to transmit messages to slaves planning on running. Once they reached safety, many fugitives worked tirelessly to free their family members still held in slavery. Escaped slaves like William and Ellen Craft, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs wrote narratives about their experiences to raise awareness and inspire others.

Native Americans held in slavery in the missions and ranches of California adopted similar techniques of resistance to those used by enslaved African Americans in the South. Some of their strategies included sabotaging ranch and farm work, raiding livestock, resisting conversion to Christianity, and refusing to give up their native language. Many Native Americans fled the missions and ranches, escaping to communities of Indians living autonomously in inland California. And, as Lorenzo Asisara's narrative attests, Native Americans also engaged in riots and revolts, sometimes killing priests and other Spanish and American authorities when they felt they had no other recourse. The stories of these enslaved people reveal the inaccuracy of racist myths about the passivity or apathy of slaves, while also exposing the limits of white hegemony. Their resistance bears witness to their extraordinary personal courage, determination, and commitment to liberty.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What was the Underground Railroad? How did it work?

Comprehension: What kinds of strategies does Frederick Douglass use to resist the degradations of slavery? How do his strategies of resistance eventually enable his escape? What kinds of strategies does Harriet Jacobs use to resist her master's unwanted advances? How are her strategies of resistance different from Douglass's?

Comprehension: Examine the advertisements for runaways featured in the archive. What do they reveal about how slaves were treated? What do they reveal about white attitudes toward runaways and toward African Americans generally?

Context: How were Sorrow Songs encoded to enable slaves to pass covert messages and aid fugitives trying to escape? How do the lyrics subtly reveal subversive intentions?

Context: What kinds of strategies of resistance (if any) does Harriet Beecher Stowe advocate for abused slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? What are the implications of her idealization of nonviolence and an ethic of sacrifice? How do you think Frederick Douglass would have felt about the description of Tom's capitulation to Simon Legree?

Context: How does Lorenzo Asisara describe the riot he was involved in at the Franciscan mission? How does his attitude toward his own act of resistance compare to Frederick Douglass's? How might the presence of a white editor have influenced the way Asisara chose to narrate his story?

Exploration: How do you think the tradition of African American resistance that developed during slavery might have influenced civil rights activism in the 1960s (for example, Martin Luther King's

"RESISTANCE / REBELLION" WEB ARCHIVE

[1650] T. C. Noble, *John Brown Lithograph* (c. 1850s), courtesy of the National Park Service, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site. This lithograph likely illustrates the moments before the hanging of John Brown after he was found guilty of murder, treason, and inciting a slave insurrection at Harpers Ferry armory in Virginia. Brown was part of a small group of radical northern abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, who by the 1850s felt that such violent insurrections were the only way to end slavery.

[2732] Anonymous, *Anti-Slavery Meeting on the [Boston] Common, from Gleason's "Pictorial"* (May 3, 1851), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. This illustration depicts militant abolitionist Wendell Phillips declaiming against the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.

[3570] Anonymous, *Mrs. Auld Teaching Him to Read* (1892), courtesy of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries. This illustration from *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* depicts the northern wife of Douglass's owner introducing Douglass to reading.

[5537] William Russell, *Runaway Slave Advertisement* (1847), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Printed Ephemera Collection. A slave owner advertises a reward for the return of five escaped slaves.

[6574] Bow Wow-Wow (pseud.) [Napoleon Sarony?], *The Secretary of War presenting a stand of colours to the 1st Regiment of Republican bloodhounds* (1840), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-91404]. This cartoon attacks the use of bloodhounds to force the Seminole Indians of Florida to move to Oklahoma. Abolitionists believed another aim of using the hounds was to capture escaped slaves who had joined the Seminoles.

[6585] Anonymous, *The Underground Railroad*, Charles T. Weber Painting (1893), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-28860]. After

1877, African Americans faced increasing disenfranchisement, the spread of lynching, debt peonage, and scientific racism. But as this painting reflects, abolitionist sentiment and a heroic view of slave resistance persisted.



[3090] Harriet Powers, Pictorial quilt (c. 1895–98), courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

strategy of nonviolence and civil disobedience, or the more militant strategies adopted by the Black Panthers and other groups)?
Exploration: Why has the exploitation and enslavement of Native Americans in California in the nineteenth century received so little attention?

Stirring Things Up: Slaves and the Creation of African American Culture

While it is important to understand the harshness and oppression that were inherent in slave life, it is equally important to appreciate the fact that African American slaves developed a vibrant life-affirming culture in the face of tremendous adversity. Because slaves came from many different regions of Africa—and thus brought with them a rich variety of cultural traditions—they were far from a homogeneous group. Bound together by shared labor, hardships, and joys in America, they formed what might be called a **creole** culture. “Creole” is a linguistic term for the phenomenon of two or more languages merging into one new language, but it can also usefully be applied to the phenomenon of two or more distinct cultures merging to form a new culture. Combining linguistic, musical, religious, and other cultural traditions from many regions of Africa with Native American, English, and other European traditions, slaves forged a dynamic culture that incorporated customs and practices from all of these places in innovative ways. The culture the slaves developed in turn influenced and transformed the cultural practices of their white masters. Slave culture was by no means homogeneous within the United States; it could vary as much as individual people do. Furthermore, slaves who lived in the low country of South Carolina might have little in common with urban slaves in New Orleans or slaves on a cotton plantation in Georgia. But everywhere, African American slaves dealt with adversity by forging communities that provided them with a sense of cohesion and pride.

Slaves transmitted jokes and wisdom through a sophisticated tradition of folk tales related to the West African legacy of “trickster tales.” Often centering on the stories of animals who are not physically strong or intimidating (such as rabbits, monkeys, or spiders), trickster tales portray these supposedly “weaker” animals consistently outwitting the stronger animals who try to oppress or control them. Such stories have an obvious significance to a people oppressed by slavery. Slaves also drew on their African inheritance of trickster tales to create “John Tales,” the stories of a slave trickster who outwitted whites.

Visitors to and memoirists of slave communities consistently celebrated the richness and beauty of the musical traditions the slaves created. Their famous spirituals, or Sorrow Songs, combined European Christian hymn traditions with sophisticated African rhythmic patterns and a “call and response” form in which a leader sings or chants a few lines and the group repeats or offers variations on the lines in response. The songs thus follow African traditions in allowing for

improvisation and communal authorship. Slaves used them to transmit communal ideals and values, take their minds off their labor, covertly protest their situation, subtly mock their white masters, and secretly pass messages and information to one another. African American slaves also made music with instruments such as drums, horns, and fiddles (sometimes crafted out of rustic objects) to play lively dance tunes at parties or “balls” held in the slave quarters. Because physical movement and dance are an important part of African musical traditions, slaves frequently incorporated expressive dances into their renditions of songs. Black musicians usually provided the music at white assemblies and parties in the antebellum South, so their musical and dance traditions also had a significant impact on white culture. The slaves’ development of dance styles and songs has had an enormous impact on the character of music and dance in the United States (and indeed in much of the rest of the world) to the present day.

Some slaves gave up dancing when they “got religion” because white preachers insisted that such physical displays were sinful. But though they would forego dancing to maintain their piety, they created the “ring shout” as a replacement. Clapping and beating time, the slaves would sing religious songs and move around in a single file circle tapping their feet in the “shout step.” Although the ring shout looked like dancing to many white observers, slaves insisted that it was not. They did not cross their feet when they performed it, and, by their definition, a dance involved crossing one’s feet.

The evolution of the religious ring shout is indicative of the way slaves adapted themselves to Christianity: they absorbed what was useful and meaningful to them, combined it with African sources, and created something new. Most African slaves brought from their African religions a belief in a Creator, or Supreme God. They were thus able to graft their traditional beliefs onto the Christian figure of Jehovah. Many came to interpret Christ, the saints, and Old Testament figures within the context of the African religious system of minor, or lesser, gods. White masters usually taught their slaves about western religion in an effort to instill in them a Christian doctrine of obedience and humility, but most slaves rejected this version of the Bible in favor of a more empowering Christian spirituality. Turning to black slave preachers who celebrated the more redemptive possibilities of Christianity, slaves identified with the stories of Moses and the Israelites triumphing over those who had enslaved them. They also focused on the concept of heaven and eternal paradise as a reward for what they had endured in this world. Combined with their Christianity, many slaves maintained a traditional belief in magic and the supernatural. “Conjurers,” charms, and spells were an integral part of life in many slave communities. Because white masters did not always approve of African American adaptations of Christianity, slaves often held secret meetings where they could practice their religion free from white interference. Even today, black and white Baptists in the South often attend different churches and have very different worship practices. Incorporating rituals of singing, shouting, and movement,



[2742] Anonymous, *The Old Plantation* (c. 1790–1800), courtesy of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center.

“STIRRING THINGS UP” WEB ARCHIVE

[1763] Timothy H. O’Sullivan, *Five Generations of Smith’s Plantation, Beaufort, S. Carolina* (1862), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-B8171-152-A]. This photo by a northern photographer in a Union-occupied area illustrates how enslaved African Americans maintained families when they were able to do so.

[2742] Anonymous, *The Old Plantation* (c. 1790–1800), courtesy of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center. This is an image of slaves dancing and playing music on the plantation, possibly in South Carolina. Slaves used dance and music as entertainment, while drawing on and combining African cultural influences.

[3090] Harriet Powers, Pictorial quilt (c. 1895–98), courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Many slave and freed women used quilts to record their histories. Some quilts communicated messages; for example, quilts using the color black are believed to have indicated a safe house on the Underground Railroad.

[4327] Anonymous, *Slave Quarters on St. Georges Island, Florida* (n.d.), courtesy of the New York Historical Society. Slaves photographed in front of cabins on the Gulf Coast. Slave quarters throughout the South were similar in size and shape, but these cabins were built of “tabby,” an aggregate of shells, lime,

and sand more common to the Caribbean region.

[7131] Anonymous, *Many Thousands Gone* (c. 1861–65), courtesy of Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs: A Study in Racial and National Music* (4th ed., 1914), Fisk University. Sorrow Songs often referred to current events through religious language. The lyrics of this song refer partly to the slaves who crossed Union lines, often joining the Union army during the Civil War. The lyrics simultaneously look to the afterlife.

[7229] Orville Carrol, *Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, Kitchen, Exterior View* (1960), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Publications Division [HABS, VA, 16-LONI.V, 1B-2]. Large plantations resembled villages or small towns, with many outbuildings.

[7230] Orville Carrol, *Green Hill Plantation, Virginia, Kitchen, Interior View* (1960), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Publications Division [HABS, VA, 16-LONI.V, 1B-3]. The kitchen on a large plantation provided cooked food for those living in the main house. Slaves usually had their own fireplaces for cooking the separate rations provided them, typically corn and pork.



[6835] *Berry Hill Plantation* (main house) (after 1933), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS, VA, 42-BOSTS.V, 1-4].

African American religion—like many of the other cultural practices the slaves developed—is an ecstatic, life-affirming experience.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What does the term “creole” mean? How can it be used to analyze the formation of cultural traditions?

Comprehension: What kinds of African religious traditions did slaves retain? How did they merge them with Christian traditions?

Comprehension: What is a “ring shout”?

Context: How does Harriet Beecher Stowe portray slave religion in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*? How accurate do you think her portrait of African American spirituality is? How do the slaves on Simon Legree’s plantation exploit traditions of magic and superstition to resist Legree’s cruelties?

Context: Examine the pictures of slave quarters featured in the archive. How do you think the physical environment of slave quarters might have fostered slave culture?

Context: Does Briton Hammon’s text reflect “creolization”? Why or why not?

Exploration: Where do you see evidence of “creolization” in contemporary American culture?

Exploration: How do you think trickster tales influenced the development of African American literature and American literature generally? Can you think of texts that employ similar strategies to those of trickster tales?

EXTENDED CONTEXTS

The Plantation: Cultivating a Myth

The ideal of gracious plantation life continues to dominate American images of the antebellum South: Hollywood movies and nostalgic novels have portrayed the Old South as a land of enormous wealth and leisure, filled with beautiful white-columned mansions, gallant gentlemen, and coquettish belles in hoop skirts. In reality, life on antebellum plantations was characterized by hard work. Time-consuming household chores and backbreaking labor in the fields structured the daily lives of the slaves, and even some of the white owners, who inhabited these estates. Few plantations lived up to the standards of size and wealth generally associated with plantation mythology; in fact, in 1860 there were only about 2,300 truly large-scale plantations in operation. The planter group (usually defined as those who owned at least twenty slaves) made up just 4 percent of the adult white male population of the South. Much more common were the small farms on which white landowners lived in modest cabins and owned few or no slaves.

Despite the fact that large plantations were far from representative

of the general southern experience, the ideal of the plantation came to dominate southern culture, setting the tone of economic and social life and functioning as a standard to which many white men aspired. The architecture of the great plantations reinforced their status as icons of wealth, sophistication, and grandeur. Highly formalized in their layout, large plantations usually centered around the “big house,” an imposing, often neoclassical structure designed as an expression of the good taste and prosperity of the owner. Wide terraces and long, tree-lined avenues controlled visitors’ access to the plantation house, while extensive stretches of cultivated fields and fenced land demonstrated the planter’s dominance over nature and society. Because few men even within the planter class could afford such splendor, landowners sometimes opted to dress up their modest homes with false fronts in order to emulate the plantation ideal. Many plain log cabins lay behind facades of Greek revival porches and neoclassical pediments.

Today, little remains of the landscape of antebellum plantation life besides the large mansions (many of which are still standing), but in the nineteenth century much of the work that sustained the plantation economy went on in smaller structures, or outbuildings, scattered over the estates. Detached kitchens, smokehouses, dairies, and water towers were important sites of domestic labor. Barns and mills were necessary in the production of the plantation’s staple crop, whether it was tobacco, cotton, rice, or sugar. Slave quarters housed the workers whose forced labor was central to the entire system. While some planters tried to hide the reality of the enslaved labor that created their prosperity—Thomas Jefferson, for example, constructed underground passageways so that visitors to Monticello would not see slaves at work—others placed slave quarters in prominent locations to function as a display of their own wealth and power. The long avenue leading to the Hermitage, Henry McAlpin’s Georgia plantation, was lined with more than seventy slave houses, apparently to impress visitors with a view of the inventory of his labor force. Usually small, simple, boxlike structures, slave quarters stood in stark contrast to the magnificent “big houses” they supported. Interestingly, some architectural historians have argued that slave houses may have held a different aesthetic significance for the slaves who lived in them than their masters may have envisioned. Rather than seeing their homes as inferior to and dependent upon the “big house,” slaves may have seen in their small, square dwellings a likeness to traditional African architecture.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Examine the pictures of plantation “big houses,” landscape plans, and slave quarters featured in the archive. How were the plantations laid out? What ideals are expressed in their landscape and architecture?

Context: How is plantation life described in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*? In



[6834] *Green Hill Plantation and Quarters* (c. 1933–60), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS, VA, 16-LONI.V, 1-1].

“THE PLANTATION” WEB ARCHIVE

[4327] Anonymous, *Slave Quarters on St. Georges Island, Florida* (n.d.), courtesy of the New York Historical Society. Slaves photographed in front of cabins on the Gulf Coast. Slave quarters throughout the U.S. were similar in size and shape, but these cabins were built of “tabby,” an aggregate of shells, lime, and sand more common to the Caribbean region.

[4735] Anonymous, *Gloucester, Near Natchez, MS* (n.d.), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-58888]. Built in 1803, this neoclassical plantation house dates from the pioneering period of white settlement in Mississippi. The columns and hanging moss fit common images of plantations.

[5096] William F. Warnecke, *Margaret Mitchell* (1938), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-109613]. *Gone With the Wind*, Mitchell’s best-selling 1936 novel of the Civil War South, won the Pulitzer Prize and became an immensely popular movie in 1939. Romanticizing wealthy slave owners and

slavery while depicting blacks in racial stereotypes, it appealed to conventional white opinion.

[6834] *Green Hill Plantation and Quarters* (c. 1933–60), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS, VA, 16-LONI.V, 1-1]. Early-nineteenth-century plantation architecture in Campbell County, Virginia. This view of Green Hill provides an alternative to the romanticized image of the Old South.

[6835] *Berry Hill Plantation* [Main House] (after 1933), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS, VA, 42-BOSTS.V, 1-4]. Photograph of a Classic Revival mansion with octa-style Doric portico in Halifax County, Virginia, designed between 1835 and 1840. The richest planters used imposing architecture to demonstrate their wealth and sophistication.

Jacobs's and Douglass's narratives? How do these texts critique the plantation system? What features of the plantation system are portrayed as the most destructive? Do any of these texts seem to perpetuate stereotypes associated with plantation life?

Exploration: Given that only a small fraction of the South's white population actually lived on large plantations, why do you think this image became so culturally dominant? Why do you think stereotypes of plantation life continue to loom large in the American imagination?

Exploration: Recently, expensive housing developments have begun using the term "plantation" to describe themselves. Thus, twenty-first-century homebuyers can purchase a house in "Oak Plantation" or "Main Street Plantation." What are the implications of this terminology? What associations do you think real estate developers are hoping the word "plantation" will have for potential purchasers?

Beyond the Pale: Interracial Relationships and "The Tragic Mulatta"

In nineteenth-century America, interracial romantic and sexual relationships were considered taboo within white culture. Viewed by many as leading to the "degeneration" of the white race, "racial mixing" was a locus of anxiety and alarm. Pseudoscientific theories backed up racist notions that conceived of black, white, and Native American people as essentially physically and psychologically different from one another, contending that those differences were traceable to people's blood. Antebellum Americans originally used the term "amalgamation" to describe interracial sex, but later coined the word **miscegenation**, with Latin roots, because it sounded more "scientific." Many states had laws on the books forbidding interracial sex, and social stigmas everywhere categorized interracial relationships as unacceptable.

When Frederick Douglass (himself the child of a white man and a black woman) married his white assistant, Helen Pitts, after the death of his first wife, even some of his socially progressive black and white associates in the North were outraged. When Lincoln's political adversaries wanted to undermine his public approval, they accused him of endorsing miscegenation (which, in fact, he did not support).

Despite attempts to legislate against it, miscegenation has existed in America since the first settlements of European immigrants in the sixteenth century. Sexual relationships among Native Americans, blacks, and whites were far from anomalous. By the nineteenth century, sex between black slaves and their white masters and mistresses had become common enough that it was a source of intense anxiety in American culture. Some whites worried that black women



[1851] Anonymous, *The Slave Sale* (c. 1855), courtesy of the Smithsonian Institute, National Museum of American History.

were seducing white men, or that black men would rape white women. In reality, most interracial sex occurred because the powerless social position of enslaved black women left them vulnerable to rape by white men. In certain parts of the South, this kind of sexual exploitation was institutionalized; slave auctions of “fancy girls”—the term used to describe especially attractive young slave women—allowed white men to purchase concubines. The mixed-race children resulting from these sexual relationships, called “mulattos,” legally followed the condition of their mothers and were thus considered slaves. While white masters occasionally freed or gave special treatment to the children they fathered by slave women, most simply worked and sold their own children like other slaves.

The plight of these mixed-race people was of particular interest to white abolitionists. They found a special poignancy in a person who was virtually white—a person with only one black great-grandparent could be held as a slave in the South—and was still treated as a slave and subject to all the cruelties of slavery. The figure of the practically white slave woman, or **tragic mulatta**, became a stock character in northern antebellum stories, novels, and plays, beginning with Lydia Maria Child’s short story “The Quadroons” (1842). Beautiful, virtuous, and endowed with all the graces of white-middle-class “true womanhood,” the tragic mulatta is usually portrayed as becoming involved with a white man whom she cannot marry because of her “single drop” of “black blood.” Other popular sentimental plots explore the stories of mixed-race women who marry non-white men and then experience all the hardships and persecutions inflicted on their husband’s race (Eliza Harris in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Ramona fit this paradigm). In any case, the fate of the mixed-race heroine in sentimental fiction usually involves tragedy. Although these stories stirred up abolitionist sentiment among white readers, they also had the effect of reinforcing racist assumptions. As many critics have pointed out, white readers may have found the tragic mulatta character sympathetic because she was so similar to themselves. In portraying only these mixed-race women as tragic, abolitionist authors implied that an enslaved white person was somehow more deserving of sympathy than an enslaved black person was. At the same time, the figure of the tragic mulatta also had radical, progressive potential: in mediating between racial categories, she exposed the arbitrary nature of racial distinctions. It is perhaps the radical, unsettling potential of the “tragic mulatta” figure that has given her currency in the work of later American novelists such as Nella Larsen (Unit 11) and Toni Morrison (Unit 16).

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: How were mixed-race people legally categorized in the antebellum South? Why do you think southern laws took the position they did with regard to mixed-race individuals? How did the laws protect the institution of slavery and ensure white hegemony?



[6828] Anonymous, *The Death of Clotel*, in William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853).

“BEYOND THE PALE” WEB ARCHIVE

[1653] J. H. Kent, *Helen Pitts Douglass* (n.d.), courtesy of the National Parks Service, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site. Helen Pitts, a white woman from Rochester, New York, where Frederick Douglass long resided, became Douglass’s second wife in 1884, braving the resultant controversy. After Douglass’s death in 1895, she worked to preserve his historical legacy.

[1851] Anonymous, *The Slave Sale* (c. 1855), courtesy of Smithsonian Institute, National Museum of American History. The caption of this lithograph reads “The Hammer Falls . . . he has got her body and soul unless God help her.” Artists and writers used images of “white” slaves, especially young women threatened by sexual abuse, to show the evils of slavery.

[6828] Anonymous, *The Death of Clotel*, in William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853). One of the first published novels by an African American, *Clotel* told the story of a slave daughter of Thomas Jefferson and contained Brown’s own personal slave narrative, as well as a fictionalized

version of William and Ellen Craft's story.

[6852] Anonymous, *Ellen Craft the Fugitive Slave* (1860), frontispiece of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* by William Craft. The light-skinned Ellen Craft escaped from slavery with her husband, William, by posing as a white man and her husband's master, symbolizing how slavery and resistance disrupted the "normal" social order.

[6877] Anonymous, *Ellen Craft* (1879), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Rare Books and Special Collections Division. In this portrait published in William Still's *The Underground Railroad*, Craft is shown in conservative female dress and with her light skin.

Context: Ellen Craft exploited her nearly white looks to escape undetected to the North. How does William Craft's characterization of her in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* engage with the tradition of the "tragic mulatta" figure? How does her story challenge the assumptions behind the cultural construction of the tragic mulatta?

Context: After their escape from slavery, the Crafts raised money by selling portraits of Ellen in her white male planter disguise. How do you think antebellum audiences would have reacted to the portrait of Ellen Craft featured in the archive? Why do you think these portraits sold well in the North?

Context: In Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, the title character is the child of a Native American and a European. How is her mixed-race heritage handled in the novel? How does Jackson's treatment of a Native American mixed-race woman compare to abolitionists' characterizations of African American mixed-race women?

Exploration: How do you think attitudes toward interracial relationships in the antebellum period affected subsequent portraits of interracial relationships in American literature and film?

ASSIGNMENTS

Personal and Creative Responses

1. *Poet's Corner:* Listen to and read the lyrics of several slave spirituals. Using your knowledge of African American "call and response" lyric patterns and techniques of improvisation, compose a new verse or new lyrics to one of the songs. Your version need not be about the African American slave experience, though it can be. How does your improvisation change the meaning and effect of the song?
2. *Journal:* Examine the advertisements for slave sales featured in the archive. Pay attention to the descriptions of the specific people offered for sale, especially their ages, occupations, relationships to one another, and prices. Compose a short journal entry or narrative about one of the people sold at these auctions, imagining their feelings about being separated from their families and purchased as property.
3. *Journal:* Imagine that you are a participant in the riot Lorenzo Asisara describes at the Santa Cruz Mission in defiance of Padre Olbes. Compose an account of the riot, expanding on Asisara's narrative. What motivated you and your compatriots to revolt? What did you hope to achieve through insurrection?
4. *Doing History:* Look at the watercolor painting *The Old Plantation* (c. 1800) featured in the archive. This painting was found in South Carolina without any records to clearly establish its artist, date of composition, or even its subject. Based on your knowledge of African American slave culture, what do you think is happening in

this painting? What was the artist trying to depict? Who do you think the artist might have been? Why did he or she paint this picture?

5. *Multimedia*: Imagine that you have been asked to speak at an abolitionist meeting in 1860 to raise public awareness about the devastating effects of slavery and to enlist others in the abolitionist movement. Even though it is 1860, you somehow have access to the *American Passages* archive and slide-show software, which is certain to dazzle your audience. Create a multimedia presentation that supports your argument for emancipation. Include captions that explain and interpret the images you choose within the context of your argument.

Problem-Based Learning Projects

1. You have been hired as a tour guide at a plantation house that has become a museum. The “big house” has been restored to its former grandeur and is now a popular tourist attraction, but the farm buildings, kitchens, and slave quarters no longer exist. You notice that many tourists focus on the beauty of the plantation house, but seem to have minimal awareness of the slave system that supported it. You are anxious to convince tourists that their romanticized notions of plantation culture are largely inaccurate. How will you structure your tour to inform them about the reality of life on a working plantation in antebellum America?
2. It is 1862 and you are a political consultant for President Lincoln. The president has decided to sign the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves held in bondage within the rebelling Confederate states. He has hired you to help him with public relations on the Emancipation Proclamation. Draft a plan for how the president and his staff should go about gaining public support and swaying public opinion in the North in favor of emancipation.
3. You are Harriet Jacobs’s literary agent. Several publishers have already turned down the chance to publish *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, claiming that the book diverges too far from the traditional conventions of slave narratives, is too open about sensitive topics like sexual exploitation, and will not be interesting to the general public. You have a meeting scheduled with the Boston firm of Thayer and Eldridge (the eventual publishers of Jacobs’s narrative). Prepare your sales pitch.

GLOSSARY

abolition The movement to end slavery in the United States. While calls for abolition emerged from Quaker activists like John Woolman during the early eighteenth century and from proponents of natural rights during the American Revolution, abolitionism did not

become an important political force in America until the early- to mid-nineteenth century.

creole A linguistic term for the phenomenon of two or more languages merging into one new language; can also usefully be applied to the phenomenon of two or more cultures merging to form a new culture.

Cult of True Womanhood This influential nineteenth-century ideal of femininity stressed the importance of motherhood, homemaking, piety, and purity. While men were expected to work and act in the public realm of business and politics, women were to remain in the private, domestic sphere of the home.

domestic fiction Novels and stories that use traditional American ideals of domesticity to move readers to sympathy, and sometimes convince them of the importance of social reform. Domestic fiction usually involves sentimental plots and was written mostly by, for, and about women.

Franciscan mission As part of the Spanish colonial project in the New World, Catholic priests of the Franciscan order were sent to California to Christianize the local Native Americans, claiming their land and turning them into laborers for the missions in the process. Because Franciscan Christianization involved compelling the Indians to give up their lands, culture, native belief practices, and independence, it often could not be accomplished by voluntary conversion and instead necessitated the use of military force. Once the Native Americans were baptized at the missions they became unpaid laborers who were not free to leave—that is, they essentially became slaves. Between 1770 and 1834 over 90,000 California Indians (a third of the pre-contact population) were enslaved within the Franciscan missions. Rampant disease and high rates of mortality ravaged the mission Indian populations.

Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made even the free territory of the northern states unsafe for escaped slaves; legally, northerners were prevented from aiding or harboring escaped fugitives. Slaves could be captured and returned to the South at any time without benefit of trial. Because slave catchers enforcing the Act collected rewards for sending slaves to the South, they sometimes seized free blacks and sold them into slavery.

miscegenation Pseudoscientific term for the mixing of races, derived from the Latin words *miscere* (to mix) and *genus* (species). Nineteenth-century ideas about miscegenation backed up racist notions that conceived of black, white, and Native American people as essentially physically and psychologically different from one another, contending that those differences were traceable to people's blood. Miscegenation was illegal in many states and culturally taboo throughout the United States in the nineteenth century. Even though many people did not want to acknowledge it, miscegenation was not uncommon in antebellum America.

slave narrative A popular autobiographical genre in which escaped slaves recount their literal and emotional journeys from slavery to freedom, often emphasizing literacy and resistance to

oppression. Authors of slave narratives were primarily concerned with gaining adherents to the abolitionist cause by convincing white readers of their intelligence and humanity—and, by extension, the intelligence and humanity of all African Americans held in slavery. They usually provide details of the degradations and abuses they suffered while enslaved, although these sufferings encompass very different experiences for each writer.

Sorrow Songs Also called “spirituals,” Sorrow Songs were developed within African American slave culture to ease the burden of labor, articulate communal values, and provide an outlet for meaningful self-expression. Drawing on both African musical styles and western European sources, Sorrow Songs are characterized by group authorship and improvisation.

tragic mulatta The figure of the practically white slave woman, or “tragic mulatta,” became a stock character in northern antebellum stories, novels, and plays, beginning with Lydia Maria Child’s short story “The Quadroons” (1842). Beautiful, virtuous, and endowed with all the graces of white middle-class “true womanhood,” the tragic mulatta is usually portrayed as becoming involved with a white man whom she cannot marry because of her “single drop” of “black blood.” Her story usually ends in tragedy.

Underground Railroad A system of concealed trails, hiding places, safe houses, and friendly supporters, the Underground Railroad was developed by abolitionists, ex-slaves, and slaves to spirit fugitives to freedom, often in Canada. “Station masters” took enormous personal risks since providing aid to fugitive slaves was illegal. A few brave ex-slaves like Harriet Tubman even ventured back into slave states to assist runaways. Tubman made at least nineteen trips to the South to help organize escapes, reportedly using coded slave songs to transmit messages to slaves planning on running.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

The African-American Mosaic: African-American Culture and History (Exhibit) and *Selected Civil War Photographs* (Exhibit). The Library of Congress. 101 Independence Ave, SE, Washington, DC, 20540. General Information (202) 707-5000. Exhibitions Information (202) 707-4604.

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News from Native California. PO Box 9145, Berkeley, CA, 94610. Phone (510) 549-2802; fax (510) 549-1889. <news@heydaybooks.com>

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