

# UNCLE TOM'S CABIN AS AN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN FICTION

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## *Abstract*

This paper aims to explore the religious theme of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. It carefully analyses about the origin of Afro American Literature, Slave narration, abolition of slavery, because North being predominantly in favour of Abolition and the south in favour of continuing the institution of slavery, the novel highlights its characters of blacks in the white dominant society, and the Role of gospel among blacks. Uncle Tom's Cabin as a religious novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Harriet as an abolitionist wrote this novel in order to resist the implementation against the Fugitive law later it become the main tool for Civil War.

Key Words: Slavery, Abolition, FugitiveLaw, Redemption, Submission, forgiveness

## *INTRODUCTION:*

Afro American literature was written to celebrate the Afro American lives and culture. To recognize the diverse work of Afro American authors and to connect the writers to their literary heritage and future. The main aim of Afro American literature is to link the readers about Afro American experience. In America racism was very prominent all over the country specifically in the south. Afro American literature analyses the problem of racial discrimination and its epistemological aspects. In the year 1820 the law Missouri Compromise passed, the institution of slavery was officially recognized of slavery to the United States. It falls into three periods, from 1760 to the early 1770s known for the evolution. In the second period between the declarations of independence in 1776 took place, and the abolition of slave trade in 1808. In the early the literature did not have a perfect form as told to narratives are accounted by blacks and are recorded by white amanuenses. Therefore the overview of the period from 1760 to 1820 refers to authors rather than writers such writings of authors comprise of manuscripts printed text. The genre including the captivity narratives letters, poetry, spiritual autobiographies, sermons, pamphlets, criminal confessions, abolitionist arguments acid slave narratives. People of Africa who settled in the lands of United States as began to embrace publicly a diaspora social and political identity of African only towards the end of the eighteenth century.

The first generation of black writers like Equiano (1745-1797) who had wrote "The Interesting Narrative of the Olaudah Equiano, Gustavus Vassa, and the African exemplifies the challenges for Black writers, and they denied legal rights and often even human identities. Immediately after the American revolution came "first emancipation" ,the antislavery movement slowly started to spread initially in the Northern states where blacks gave access to education, employment and also some civil rights like

property owning and enjoying freedom from slavery .some African people did not saw the new united states as the promised land of freedom and equality. The writings of African American societies frequently displayed an assertive tone and arguments addressing their constituents they mainly aimed at white readers. African American writings expressed their hope that abolition of slavery will follow them soon. Author Daniel Coker shows pervasive white resistance to ending slavery forced black authors to be quite when addressing the issue to a white audience. In the early nineteenth century the achievements of black and white abolitionists in the northern states begun to be stalled and reversed, this led people into frustration , slavery issue saw emigration of blacks and their expulsion from united states as the possible solution for racism. In the period of nineteenth century back to Africa become an issue for black writers.

In 1845 Afro American literature gained a new writer Fredrick Douglass who wrote “narrative of the life of Fredrick Douglass, an American slave written by himself”, this book elaborates about the development of afro American literature and the abolitionist movement. Fredrick used his own life experience within the system of slavery and he has extended his work to provide the cause for abolition. Douglass work was recognized as one of the most influential slave narratives and also considered as one of the classical work of American literature.

Douglass narrative book brought him immediate success and it sold out nearly 5000 copies, and also translated to germen French and Dutch languages .many antislavery stories, meetings and the formal conversations among activists had been published through

antislavery press the booksellers and the publishers become the cause for antislavery and for other reform movements. James Olney argued about the conventions for slave narratives and included about the physical abuse cruelty of Christian slave holders, description about the amount of food and clothes given to the slaves. Versatility is seen among the slave narrative features shared by the significant differences of their experiences, geographical situation, public recognition, and the dynamics of authorship. There is a significant difference of narrative occasion, strategy, and purpose. some slave narratives are written by the individuals themselves and some by white antislavery sympathizers .even the white narrators faced the faced problems as did afro American writers provided a determined struggle against their perspectives and assumptions promoted by the white supremacist culture.one of the well-known slave narratives were the life of Josiah Henson ,formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada, narrated by himself in 1849, written by Samuel A. Eliot later become the source for the character of uncle Tom in Harriet beecher stowe’s uncle tom’s cabin, most influential work of antislavery. Later slave narrative become a genre of writing characterized by a struggle between black and white perspectives on a wide range of concerns including slavery, race, civil rights, and even on the priorities of literary art. The works of African American abolitionist expressed culture .the spiritual worked not only in resisting enslavement but also helped about the preservation of humanity among the society. Afro American writers devoted their writings and talents

towards abolitionist movement have influential, stories that approached the subject with autobiographies and memoirs.

### *AUTHOR'S NOTE:*

Harriet Beecher Stowe as born on June 14<sup>th</sup> 1811. Stowe started her studies in her native place, Litchfield named Connecticut. Her father was a Congregationalist named Lyman Beecher and her mother Roxana Foote Beecher affected by Tuberculosis, five years later she dies for the victim of tuberculosis. Harriet was influenced by her mother's pious and benevolence. Her powerful Christian influence and gentle example inspired everyone. Harriet's father Lyman Beecher, was an energetic clergy man, reformer and educator. At the age of 13, Stowe attended the Litchfield female Academy after two years; she began her carrier as teacher at the seminary. Beecher family shifted to Ohio when his father needs to save the frontier from Catholics. In Cincinnati Harriet started writing stories, sketching local journals and compiling school biographies till 1836. Harriet was married to Calvi Ellis Stowe,

was a clergyman and he worked as a professor of phi logy at lane theological seminary. He encouraged Harriet to write. In 1836 she become mother for twin girls ,later she had three more children Harriet involved herself as abolitionist preacher Stowe begun weekly National Era .Harriet published a series of sketches about uncle slave emancipation . A sketch later it has become the main reason for Uncle Tom's cabin, which she had combined with her real life experiences. While Stowe's stay in Cincinnati, her contact with fugitive slaves helped her to gain knowledge about the slaves holding community. In 1849 Stowe lost her sixth child in an epidemic cholera disease her separation from her child made to realize the feelings of slave mothers who were separated from their children inspite of slavery. Harriet family moved to Brunswick Maine. In order to protest the Fugitive law Harriet started writing antislavery weekly in national Era .uncle tom's cabin came as a series from June 5, 1851 to April 1, 1852 and she immediately published as book .uncle tom's cabin was translated to several languages and with the success of uncle tom's cabin, which gradually increased the literary contribution of slave to the world. After 1853 she contributed twenty fine books, over the next thirty years. Her work compressed antislavery writings, novels, children stories, society of England and New York and she also wrote about sexual oppression of women. Harriet remained one of the leading writers of 19<sup>th</sup> century. She remained popular .in 1889 Stowe suffered a serious declare in health, Stowe died in Hartford on July 1, 1896.

### *Nutshell of the story:*

This story begins on the plantations in Kentucky where slave conditions are relatively mind. In order to pay off his debt to a slave trader, he sells valued slave Uncle Tom who is the main protagonist. Haley pressures Shelby into including Eliza's son, Harry. Eliza runs away. Tom, on the other hand, vows to help Mr. Shelby and other slaves by putting Tom into God's hands and allowing himself to be sold. The narrative of the story switches back and forth between Eliza's story and Tom's story. Eliza crosses the

Ohio River shows her heroic deeds Eliza reaches Canada from North. On her journey she was helped by various white anti abolitionist senators and Quakers .After several adventures she reunites with her husband George at Canada.

Before reaching the market, Tom was brought by Augustine St.Clare , a new Orleans gentleman at the request of his angelic daughter little Eva . Eva known for her extreme goodness, frailty, and her pure love serves as an inspiration to the people around Eva. Eva dies unfortunately for tuberculosis. St. Clare promises for Tom's freedom but dies suddenly. Tom is sold to the hands of evil master Simon Legree under Louisiana plantations. Tom suffers under severe torments greatly and is eventually beaten to death .Before Tom Dies. His noble example converts several Legree's slaves to Christianity and inspires everyone. Mr.Shelby son George arrives late to save tom.

### UNCLE TOM'S CABIN AS A CHRISTIAN FICTION

Christian fiction applies biblical ethics and morality to life issues .These stories reflect the trails of the Christian individual whose faith is being tested by challenges and promises of the real world.

To be considered for publication by Christian publishing house, a manuscript must include the following features:

- Characters professing faith in Jesus Christ.
- Significant references to biblical stories, verses and characters.
- Dialogue or narrative that communicates Christian truths
- Stories that express moral values, lifestyles and choices based on Christian faith and truth.(walker 1998,4)

Mostly Christian fictions written by African American literature is evidenced with evangelical note. Uncle Tom's cabin reflects the moral values of Christianity and makes reference to biblical stories, evangelical fiction overtly and very specifically draws on the biblical authority. The characters in the Christian fiction do not simply proffers a belief in a distant Christ, rather there is an emotional commitment to Jesus as a personal saviour. Christian fictions in afro American literature also provides the opportunity to reflects and to learn to affirm personal values , to offer direction in the search for something greater , to answer spiritual questions and to motivate and inspire. The popularity of African American literature reflects the broader trends of graving interest in spirituality and a return to Christian religion by many Americans because the society need solace and security.

Evolution of African American Christian fiction:

African American authors have been influenced by religion since America's colonial period. The earliest works were written primarily to convert or inspire to praise God and to demonstrate the power of Christian faith, they were essentially didactic. Earlier clear purpose of demonstrating the value of faith among the readers.

**African American Christian fictions are evidenced with specific features in their novels:** they are

- **Tone**
- **Characters**
- **Romance**
- **Redemption**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Submission**

*Tone:*

American Christian fiction is growing steadily in popularity. It is most reflective of the biblical tradition of black literature, in which Christianity, in which Christianity is seen as a salvation and Jesus as a close acquaintance. African American Christian fiction generally gives innocent views of life it projects even with the struggles than much mainstream fiction and it also provides readers with expected hope for conclusions. In this story Uncle Tom's Cabin, it projects the pain of people's heart under the evil doings of slavery, separation of families, women and child abuse in the case of people working in the southern plantations like Eliza and her little son Harry, St. Clare and Cassy, Tom's piety, truthfulness, his character formed by the domestic tranquillity which surrounds him. The evil white masters Haley and Simon Legree their brutal actions over the innocent slaves lives very pathetic.

*Character:*

The protagonist are charming and engaging good rather than evil. They realistically represent the real life temptations facing to have faith is the most important aspect of life. In this novel Uncle Tom's Cabin the protagonist Tom is known for his sense of spirituality, extreme goodness and his irresistibly admirable throughout all his trials and torments under the strong subjugation of his white masters Haley and Simon Legree. He is strong, kind; intelligent. Tom's choices are guided by his belief in God and Christ. His martyrdom remains one of the most controversial aspects of the novel. Eliza, the heroine of the novel well educated, pious, seems to be like mixed European and African heritage easily passes as white. George Harris a Creole gentleman, light skinned and the only slave who offers rational arguments against slavery and the black character in the story threatens the whites.



African American Christian fiction is also evidenced with few saints in the story .Eve St.Clare, the youngest daughter of St. Clare in the story; her extreme goodness, frailty, and natural piety mark her as too good for this world as saint in nature. She is full of pure love; an inspiration to all who come in contact with her and her dying words describes her arrival in the heaven. The protagonist tom's martyrdom remains one of the most controversial aspects of the novel.

### *Romance:*

African American in Christian fiction reflected in a variety of genres and romance is particularly popular. A Christian approach to a romantic love is grounded in the bible. The 13<sup>th</sup> chapter 1st Corinthians describes love as one of God's greatest gifts. True love never fails. God's love helps the character develop self-respect and high self-esteem, and recognize that he, or she is worthy of being loved placing God at the Centre of the love relationship gives its meaning and elevates it beyond simple romance or physical attraction.

### *Redemption:*

Stories of Christian fiction revolve around common everyday problems. The battles in the stories are ultimately won through the characters continuous hope, trust, and faith in God. Although temptation and sorrow may have external causes, in the story of Uncle tom's cabin the resolution of the problem depends on the protagonist tom's faith and resolve.

### *Forgiveness:*

The themes of forgiveness extend beyond the redemption that an individual may receive through God's forgiveness. Many of the characters have difficulty emulating this divine characteristic, although they are called upon by their faith to do so. The stories may revolve around the importance of extending forgiveness and love towards another human being who has in some way hurt or encouraged the protagonist. The protagonist can only achieve grace by absolving another and this may be hardest challenge he or she faces.

*Submission:*

The third chapter of proverbs offers another important theme for Christian fiction focus on the need for trust and faith in god in accordance with biblical principles. Bible says trust in the lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledges and he will make your paths straight. The story lines in African American Christian fiction focus on the need for trust and faith in god in accordance with biblical principles. To achieve redemption the characters must humble themselves as they come back to Christ, and they learn once again the importance of willing submission.

*Conclusion:*

The framework of this novel reflects the religious symbols and allegories. The characters like Uncle Tom and Eva professing a strong faith in Christ. Uncle Tom's Cabin reflects the moral values of Christianity and makes reference to biblical stories, evangelical fiction overtly and very specifically draws on the biblical authority.

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