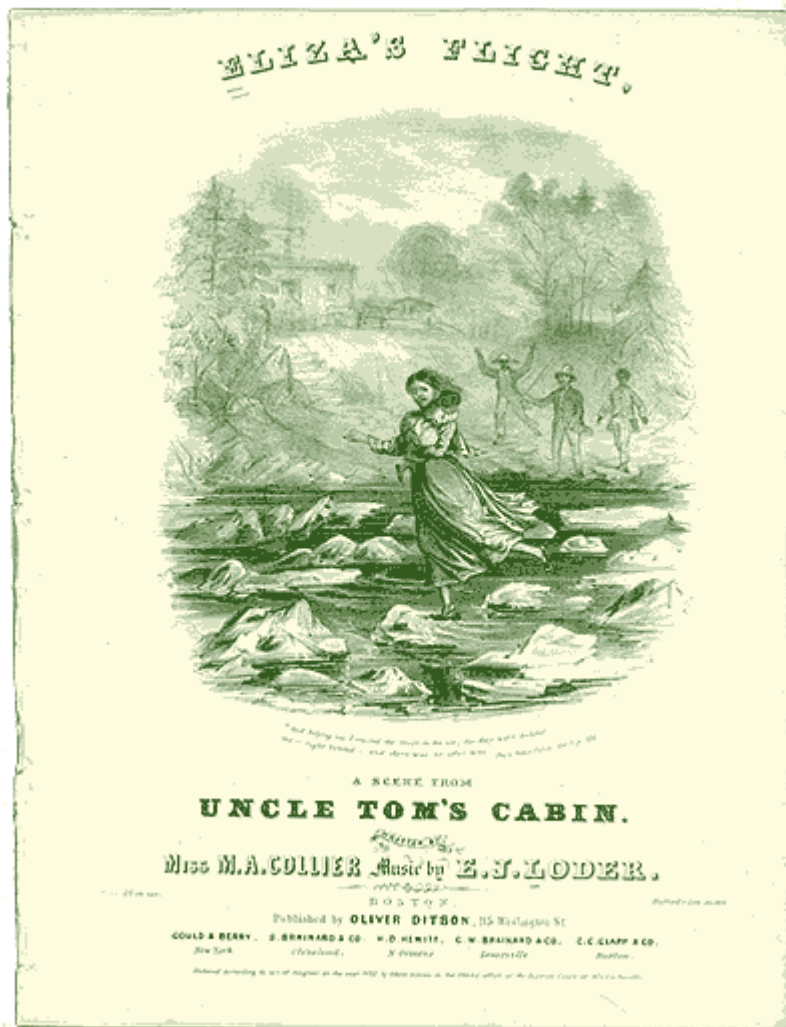


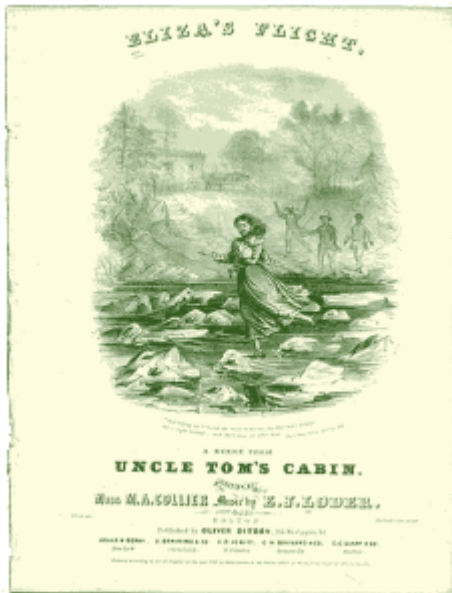
# Uncle Tom's Home Page



Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly*, achieved national prominence in its own day and remains a national icon today. When it first appeared as a serial in 1851-52 in the weekly *Washington National Era*, Stowe's tear-jerking tale of the hardships of slavery roused the nation. Published as a book in March of 1852, the novel sold 10,000 copies within a week and 300,000 copies before the year was out. It would become the best selling American novel of the decade, garnering unprecedented sales both at home and abroad. As the nation divided, so did Stowe's readers. By the time the Civil War broke out, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had come to play such an important role in the national debate over slavery that when Lincoln met Stowe he is rumored to have remarked, "So this is the little lady who made this big war."

A rich resource for anyone interested in [Uncle Tom's Cabin] and its context.

But that was just the beginning. Before, during, and long after the Civil War ended, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also inspired all kinds of popular entertainment, from ballads and minstrel acts to nursery rhymes and card games. And, with its vivid pictorial qualities and astonishing effect on readers, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was almost immediately adapted to the American stage and remained a fixture in the repertoire of popular drama into the twentieth century, inspiring no fewer than ten films between 1903 and 1927.



"Eliza's Flight" (sheet music). Courtesy of the AAS.

Introductions to well-thumbed modern editions of Stowe's text used in high school and college classrooms across the country almost never fail to quote Lincoln's reaction to Stowe. Less well known is the popular response to the author and her most famous novel. But both are explored at an exciting new Website, ["Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture: A Multi-Media Archive"](#). Developed and directed by Stephen Railton of the University of Virginia, *"Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture"* is a rich resource for anyone interested in the novel and its context.

Far reaching in its range, *"Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture"* amasses a rich archive of textual material in print, sheet music, song, illustration, and film, allowing viewers to encounter the many faces of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The easily navigable Website organizes its archive into four parts, running chronologically from pre-publication to response. Part One, "Pre-Texts, 1830-1852," excerpts and reproduces the kind of religious, sentimental, and popular texts that set the stage for Stowe's writing. For Part Two, "Stowe's Uncle Toms," the site wisely adopts a bibliographical approach, presenting mostly nineteenth-century editions of the novel, replete with illustrations, and accessible via a variety of browsable options. This part of the site even offers editions of the work in Yiddish and Swedish, a fascinating experience for someone curious to see the way this overwrought, overdetermined American

text looks and reads in a distinctly foreign language and setting (these two foreign editions actually whet the appetite for more). Next, Part Three, "Responses, 1852-1930," assembles a wide-ranging assortment of reviews organized into categories as general, pro-slavery, and African American. Finally, in Part Four, "Other Media," Railton has devoted a considerable portion of the site to collecting multimedia representations of this often - reproduced text. Here, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and American Culture" uses the visual and audio capacities of the Internet as effectively as it does the archival. A section on films presents clips of nearly half the silent versions of the novel made between 1903-27; on stage productions, general information about dramatic adaptations of the novel and illustrations of leading players; and on songs, sheet music and audio clips of their performance. There is even a collection of "Uncle Tomitudes," replicas of the novel's characters and settings in card games, dolls, objects of art, porcelain, and other miscellanies appropriated by a quickly commercializing society. Links help viewers to connect the work to related contextual settings: minstrelsy, domestic sentimentalism, death of children, and slavery.



Detail of advertisement, 1854. Courtesy of the AAS.

"*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and American Culture" could emerge only from a sustained collaborative effort, as good sites must. Railton lists in his credits a string of scholars, colleagues, performing artists, technical support staff, and sponsoring institutions equal in length to that of a full-length Hollywood film. Like a well-placed director overseeing the finest talent in the profession, he has made excellent use of his situation at the University of Virginia, an institution with a history of excellence in print-based textual scholarship that has now become a pioneer in the creation of electronic texts. He brings the resources of its Electronic Texts Center, Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, and special collections at Alderman Library into support of the site, backed as well by those of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Hartford. With all this professional and institutional help, Railton has orchestrated a textual site that minimizes the usual weaknesses of the Web—sloppy writing, superficial content, nonfunctional links, and technical

inoperability—and maximizes its strengths—archival depth and breadth, visual and audio enhancement, and fluid navigability. The result is a pedagogical Website that positions its everyday readers to place the novel in a rich, deep context, a context that, in earlier times, would have taken a professional scholar considerable time, effort, and expense to reconstruct.

Railton and his collaborators have worked hard to maximize this site's usefulness, and they have succeeded admirably. They have given its viewers more *Uncle Tom's Cabin*-related materials than they could amass from even the finest library and museum together—and have positioned it, of course, right at their fingertips. For scholars, librarians, and students alike, it provides easy access to a rich cross-cultural slice of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Americana. Renderings of the past—as text, song, illustration, and film—are nearly instantaneously available. But it is not simply that the site allows viewers to recover versions of the past; it also positions them to explore, interpret, and analyze the past, at least in part, on their own terms.

All of which is to say, this is no ordinary academic Website. I think of it, rather, as a model of what a multimedia humanities site can and should be. To that end, Railton has chosen a perfect subject. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* holds a special place not only in our cultural history, consciousness, and language but also in the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century media. Nothing could be more fitting a tribute to that status than [“Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture”](#)—the latest cultural production of a text that was born to remarkable media exposure and that for a century and a half has occupied one of the most significant and interesting points of intersection in our history between media and culture.

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