The Construction of Race and the Politics of Memory in American Anti- and Pro-Slavery Fiction from Harriet Beecher Stowe to Thomas Nelson Page

Master's Thesis

In North American Studies

Leiden University

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22 January 2018
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Table of Contents

Introduction....1

Chapter 1: Romantic Racialism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*....4

Race Theories....6

Backlash....9

Subverting Racial Stereotypes....11

Representing Slaves as Children....15

Salvation for the Slaves....17

Colonization....19

Conclusion....21

Chapter 2: Servitude as a "Necessary *Good*" In Eastman's Aunt Phillis's Cabin....23

The History of Slavery Apology....25

Submitting Oneself to be the Perfect Servant....30

Disloyal Slaves....33

Justifying Slavery through Authority Figures....38

Demonizing Abolitionism....40

Conclusion....42

Chapter 3: The Politics of Race and Memory in Page's Plantation Fiction....43

The Civil War and Reconstruction....45

Plantation Fiction, its Authors, and the Myth of the Old South....49

The Myth of Black Nostalgia for Slavery....53

Criticizing the Civil War and Reconstruction....57

Conclusion....61

Conclusion....63

Works Cited....67

Introduction

While the United States of America were more or less founded on compromise following disagreements, few of those disagreements were as threatening for the existence of the Union as the abolition of slavery. Southerners refusing to give up their free labor and the abolitionists occasionally using radical rhetoric both brought with them a deep sense of insecurity for U.S. citizens. Secession, military intervention, or even the destruction of the Union were feared to be possible during the antebellum period, as each would prove to be catastrophic for the relatively peaceful coexistence between North and South (Coates). Abolitionists increasingly received support throughout the North. As a response to the abolitionists' approval, Southern apologists began to justify slavery as a "positive good" instead of a "necessary evil," now arguing that slaves actually benefited from being in servitude (Riss 527). This debate had increased in its fury by the time Harriet Beecher Stowe published her well-known anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which, while being undoubtedly anti-slavery, was equally intended to propagate a more moderate form of abolitionism in order to distance herself from the more aggressive abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison. Southern slave apologists responded to the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by attacking Stowe and writing anti-Tom novels intended to propagate their belief that slavery on their plantations was benevolent. Ultimately, as the abolition of slavery was an issue that was not easily resolved, the South seceded over its refusal to end it, leading to the Civil War that lasted from 1861 to 1865 (McPherson 235).

After the Civil War parts of the South lay in ruins and over six hundred thousand people had been killed (Fox). During the Reconstruction Era, which lasted until 1877, politicians debated on how the reinstated Southern states would be reintegrated into the nation (Foner xxvii). While Republican Congressmen tried to have the South treat freedpeople as

citizens by ratifying new amendments that would guarantee their civil rights, the South was increasingly able to wrest control over the ideals of the Reconstruction. Ultimately, Northerners felt it was better to have the South be swiftly incorporated into the Union in order to start a new working relationship, regardless of what consequences this had for emancipated African Americans. White people on both sides were tired of the tensions between states, of the ensuing war effort, and of the emancipation debate (MacKethan 8). The South grabbed this opportunity to oppress black citizens, by restricting their civil rights and performing outright terrorism through various secret groups. Moreover, they changed the memory of the Civil War and the preceding slavery debate, creating what has become known as the myth of the Old South, a nostalgic view of the antebellum South peopled by benevolent masters and happy and contented slaves.

Throughout the antebellum slavery debate, the white voice remained the dominant one. Even in abolitionist circles the "dominant presence of white abolitionists [. . .] made the slave narratives a genre of writing characterized by an ongoing struggle between black and white perspectives" (Ernest 95). While black abolitionists and former slaves were allowed – and encouraged – to write slave narratives if they could, even those were usually prefaced by white abolitionists who, it was reasoned, with their white authority gave the former slaves' memoirs credibility (95). This established a framework where African Americans were mainly used as witnesses to the horrors of slavery and not necessarily as human beings who had autonomy over their own lives, as white abolitionists and authors controlled their narratives.

The white authors of the three works of slavery fiction I discuss in this thesis, written in the antebellum and post-Reconstruction periods, all use this framework in order to take control of the black narrative. I will argue that the authors of these texts, regardless of whether they wrote from an anti- or pro-slavery perspective, incorporated stigmatizing racial beliefs

about black people in order to authenticate what they believed was the true character of African Americans, only to continue to oppress them as a result. I intend to demonstrate this by close-reading these works, as well as employing literary criticism and socio-historical analyses of racism, racial theories and of the construction of white hegemony by such scholars as David Blight, W. E. B. Du Bois, Eric Foner, Barbara Hochman, Joy Jordan-Lake and Arthur Riss.

The first novel I will analyze is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which illustrates Stowe's persistent use of racialist theories that portrayed African Americans in a stereotypical manner, despite her arguing for the abolition of their enslavement. By portraying African Americans in a romantic racialist manner, Stowe essentially replaces the existing, more hateful racial black stereotypes with ones that are intended to be more benevolent, but are nevertheless detrimental to the image of African Americans.

The second novel is Mary Henderson Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* (1852), one of several anti-Tom novels written between the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the start of the Civil War. I will illustrate how Eastman further subjugates black people by portraying them as childlike people who need to remain in servitude both out of obligation to fulfill their duties and because the institution is benevolent to them. Eastman uses this contradictory reasoning to justify the slavery system as benevolent and as something for which the South has no responsibility, as she views the South as utterly virtuous (Jordan-Lake 7).

The third work is Thomas Nelson Page's short story collection *In Ole Virginia* (1887). In it, Page uses former slaves as witnesses to the benevolence of the slavery system and life on the antebellum plantations so he can justify his white supremacist beliefs. By doing so, Page helps construct the myth of the Old South, which legitimized the continued oppression of the emancipated African Americans in the post-Reconstruction South and shifted the view of the South to a more benevolent one than ever existed in reality.

Chapter 1: Romantic Racialism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was enormously popular among readers. The novel was widely read when it was published in installments in the abolitionist journal *The National Era*, and sold extremely well when published as a two-volume book (later combined into a single volume) (Winship). Over 300,000 copies of the novel were sold in its first year in the United States alone, which was an impressive feat for any type of anti-slavery literature as slave narratives and other abolitionist publications never sold anywhere close to that number (Winship). The novel's success can therefore be considered a sign of abolitionism's mainstream acceptance within the Northern states of America. Precisely because it was much more successful than other abolitionist publications, the question remains as to why Stowe's novel, and its message, spoke to her readers as well as it did.

The American anti-slavery movement began in 1831, when William Lloyd Garrison and Isaac Knapp founded the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. While slavery had been gradually abolished throughout the Northern states after the American Revolution, the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), founded in 1833 by Garrison and Arthur Tappan, proclaimed that it should be abolished immediately throughout the country. In its effort to combat slavery, the AASS regularly held meetings throughout the North and distributed newspapers and other abolitionist tracts, such as slave narratives, in order to spread awareness of their cause (Wigham 3). The movement also frequently held protests to spread awareness, which occasionally turned violent when abolitionists and slavery advocates confronted each other (3). Slavery advocates (most of whom of course resided in the slave-holding South) were vehemently opposed to this intrusion upon their constitutional right to own slaves. Slave owners and pro-slavery thinkers like George Fitzhugh did not want their slave labor to be taken away, and especially objected to any interference regarding slavery from other states

(Riss 527). In response to the rise of the abolition movement, slavery advocates began to defend slavery as a benevolent system, one better than the conditions Northern industrial workers experienced (527). Some Southerners referred to these Northern workers as "wage slaves" in order to highlight what they viewed as Northern hypocrisy, accusing them of being judgmental about Southern slavery rather than taking care of their own workers (527).

The abolition of slavery quickly became a federal issue, as Southern states "complained that the Northern states were asserting their states' rights and that the national government was not powerful enough to counter these Northern claims" (Finkelman 452). The pervasive political anxiety turned the country "[into] an increasingly polarized society, fraught with violence," as slavery advocates complained about floods of abolitionist propaganda and insisted that Northern abolitionists were overly aggressive over the Southern decision to keep human servitude intact (Hochman 51).

As part of the Compromise of 1850 that tried to hold the nation together, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was introduced. The Act, which ordered Northern states to cooperate with the South to retrieve their fugitive slaves, was considered a sign that slavery would not, as had been predicted by some, slowly disappear but would actually be more firmly embedded constitutionally (Rierson 766). The fact that the Compromise allowed slavery to be expanded into the new territories confirmed this belief (766). The Act caused moral outrage in the North as it made them complicit in the slavery they had abolished (766). It is also what led Harriet Beecher Stowe, a Connecticut-born former teacher and daughter of a Calvinist preacher, to convert to the abolitionist cause and write her anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The work was applauded in the North at the time of its publication for its inspiring anti-slavery stance, as Stowe clearly laid out the injustice of the system – even if slave-owners treated their slaves well – and lauded the innate piety of her enslaved characters, arguing that black people were in fact nobler and better Christians than whites (Goldner 73).

The academic debate about the representation of slave characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been fraught with the complexities of the novel's representation of race, in particular because the novel reproduced and familiarized racial stereotypes; characters like Uncle Tom and Topsy would ultimately become stereotypical staples of Vaudeville Theater and other forms of popular culture. The characters in the novel are not portrayed quite as stereotypical as in later adaptations of the novel, but they are nevertheless problematic precisely because they are intended to convey admirable characteristics.

My close-reading of the novel will analyze the representation of several black characters in the novel - Uncle Tom, Topsy, Sambo and Quimbo, and George Harris – as well as that of Stowe's omniscient narrator's comments on race, and show that they are influenced by race theories that emerged in the early nineteenth century. I will argue that in order to convince her white readers of the righteousness of the abolitionist cause, Stowe reinforces familiar "benign" stereotypes, such as African Americans having a childlike purity and especially an innate piousness so that they appear morally superior to whites (Fredrickson 101). Stowe does this to fit the plight of maligned slaves into a sentimental work that focuses on their repression and the immorality of slavery (Koenig 288). However, by doing so Stowe misrepresents black people as she replaces one form of racialist beliefs with another, albeit one that is romantic and more benign.

Race Theories

In order to understand Stowe's views of race, they have to be put in the context of nineteenth-century race theories. In this period attempts were made to turn race into a biological concept, out of which cultural concepts had evolved (Branson 164). This subdivision of the human race is commonly described as racialism. Racialism is, as Kwame Anthony Appiah describes it, the value-neutral term for categorizing races (266). Racialists

believed that black people constituted an entirely different race than whites, with their own characteristics in terms of disposition, strengths and weaknesses. Black people's inferiority was established by attributing specific racial traits to them. It is therefore different from racism, which is a value-charged term for the practice of describing their race pejoratively through negative terms (266).

Slavery apologists were quick to co-opt racialism as a method of categorizing races to justify white supremacy and continue their subjugation over black people (Lewy 265). Black people were treated as inferior human beings – if they were considered to be human at all – and slavery apologists provided evidence for their inferiority from a variety of sources. Pseudoscientific arguments were used to claim that black people were intellectually less developed than white people (McCandless 212). By comparing the skull shape and facial features of black and white people, pseudoscientists such as craniologists and phrenologists argued that the different head shapes indicated different (and inferior, in the case of black people) mental capacities (212). In his book *Elements of Phrenology* (1824), the American physician Charles Caldwell states for instance that only the Caucasian race exhibits "real human greatness," whereas "the genuine African figure occupies an intermediate station between the figure of the Caucasian and the Ourangoutang" (253).

At the same time, the physical prowess of black men was perceived to be much greater than that of white men (Lewy 265). While not an entirely negative trait in and of itself, this preconception did reinforce the presumed danger inherent in black men. The slaves' physical strength combined with the supposed inferiority of their mental capacities gave slave owners ample rationalization to keep their slaves uneducated and oppressed, as those learning to read were more likely to escape and revolt (Hochman 53). Furthermore, white people were deeply troubled by much publicized brutal attacks of black slaves upon white people, such as Nat Turner's revolt in Virginia in 1831. Turner and his fellow slaves had freed themselves and

countless other slaves and killed more than fifty white people until they were stopped (Breen 98). White citizens were terrified that other slaves might do the same and allowed the oppression of slaves in order to prevent such occurrences.

Biblical passages were also used to emphasize the racial divide and justify the oppression of black people. The biblical passage about the curse of Canaan was used most often. Black people were widely seen as the "sons of Canaan," whose skin was believed to be blackened due to shame (Kidd 39). Canaan, grandson of Noah, is cursed by the latter after Ham, Canaan's father, had done a "grave deed" – the exact details of which have been debated for almost two thousand years: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant (Genesis 9:25–7). Canaan being cursed to eternal servitude and the mentioning of blackened skin were taken by slavery advocates as biblical justification for the subjugation of their own slaves. Stowe even refers to this exact passage in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where, in a scene on an Ohio boat, a "grave-looking" clergyman argues that "[i]t's undoubtedly the intention of Providence that the African race should be servants" due to Canaan's curse (200). By quoting this well-known rationalization, Stowe illustrates her familiarity with the pro-slavery rhetoric. She also subverts their claim of moral superiority from using biblical evidence by arguing that the black race is more pious than the white, making them the morally superior race.

Stowe's representation of her black characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was heavily influenced by Alexander Kinmont, a Swedenborgian theologian, who proposed a gentle romantic form of racialism. Romantic racialism, a term coined by George M. Fredrickson, defines a positively intended version of the "value-neutral" form of racialism (101). People adhering to the romantic variant believed black people to be gentler, more pure, and "more

receptive and closer to true Christianity, hence morally superior to the cold Anglo-Saxon race" (Koenig 288). People subscribing to this sentiment viewed "the supposed African American racial attributes – childishness, docility, patience, affection – as positive qualities in the face of the ungentle world" (288). Stowe literally reiterates these attributes of black people throughout her novel. Her omniscient narrator praises the black characters for "their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childlike simplicity of affection, and facility of forgiveness," which enable enslaved blacks to "exhibit the highest form of the peculiarly Christian life" (275). Stowe, who wanted to write a tale that simultaneously criticized slavery and elevated black people, incorporated those elements in her descriptions of enslaved characters, depicting them as pious Christians or making them convert.

Backlash

After the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe was criticized heavily by Southern reviewers for spreading falsehoods in her novel. Her critics believed that Stowe had no right to write a novel about a Southern plantation, as she was only a Northern woman who had no experience with plantation life (Otter 17). Stowe would be the first to agree with that as she had in fact never visited a Southern plantation. That was the reason why she had done so much research, which she later outlined in her book *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853). In it, Stowe provided evidence for her representation of slavery as an immoral institution by referencing, among others, the various slave narratives she had consulted. During the writing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe wanted to make sure her anecdotal evidence could be supported by fact, as she had limited experience with slavery and did not want the credibility of her novel to suffer for her lack of first-hand knowledge (Otter 25). Nevertheless, some sources

she cited were in fact works she had read after finishing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (*Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture*).

Regardless, Southern critics disagreed with Stowe's arguments due to her abolitionist message. John R. Thompson, writer for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, wrote that Stowe was "the mouthpiece of a large and dangerous faction which if we [the South] do not put down with the pen, we may be compelled one day [. . .] to repel with bayonet" (638). Stowe acknowledged in *A Key* that her novel was "a very inadequate representation of slavery" (1). However, she argued that this was done partially on purpose: "A work which should represent [slavery] strictly as it is would be a work which could not be read; and all works which ever mean to give pleasure must draw a veil somewhere, or they cannot succeed" (1). This reasoning seems to be the basis of the sentimental portrayal of her characters.

Stowe's overt reliance on slave narratives also had a few unintentional side effects. Her use of slave narratives made her novel somewhat more romantic than Stowe's original intention of grounding it in reality. As Stephen Butterfield argues in *Black Autobiography in America*, "when he came to set his story down on paper, the slave narrator had little choice but to adapt the literary forms and traditions of white American culture" (47). Referring to *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Paul Jones argues that "it is not surprising that Douglass would choose the historical romance [. . .] to relate the tale of a slave hero. In antebellum culture, the genre would have been the most obvious form to present heroic acts to a broad audience" (60). This inspired Stowe to imbue her own tale of slavery with romantic and sentimental elements, also to reach a broad audience.

Additionally, freed slaves who penned their narratives often voluntarily or forcibly toned down the violence and other potentially controversial aspects in their narratives (Butterfield 47). Barbara Hochmann points out that, as readers had become somewhat desensitized by the news of slave abuse that other abolitionists continued to spread, slave

narrators – and Stowe herself, in part – urged by the white abolitionists who helped them write their narratives, ended up focusing more on the romantic heroism of their protagonists than on the terrors of slavery in general (44). In this way, the suffering became personal instead of the impersonal descriptions found in these narratives, making it easier for readers to empathize with the enslaved.

However, her reliance on slave narratives even led to the accusation of plagiarism. Martin R. Delany, a black abolitionist, accused her of using so much of Josiah Henson's 1849 slave narrative that "she and her publishers owe him a portion of the profits" (224). Stowe was undoubtedly inspired by Henson's narrative while researching her own; she admits as such in *A Key*. Henson's narrative relates how he, while being a slave, became a preacher, which is similar to Tom. Henson, however, ended up plotting his own escape and moved to Canada where he and his fellow freedmen set up a colony for escaped blacks. One can see that Henson's narrative influenced the portrayal of both Uncle Tom and George Harris in Henson's narrative but plagiarism is perhaps overstated.

Subverting Racial Stereotypes

Stowe's racial views, inspired by Kinmont, are most apparent in her decision to make Uncle Tom a pious, eventually even Christ-like figure (Koenig 288). Tom stands in contrast to the other enslaved characters, who tend to be described according to stereotypes of the time (simple-minded children and mammies), as well as to the white characters, who cannot become as pious as he because they are white. He is the only character in the novel who, according to Stowe, understands that a true Christian is willing to die for other people's sins in the same way as Jesus did. Tom has more authority concerning spiritual matters than the other characters, regardless of their race. As a result, Stowe can use Tom to call out slavery as an immoral institute. Stowe attempts to elevate Tom and the other black characters by

adopting the romantic notion that black people innately are better Christians than whites, and thus morally superior.

Tom's devoutness is also apparent in his approach to the Bible. While he can barely read the words of Scripture, and his Bible is annotated to help him understand it better, Tom is still perceived to be a better Christian than educated whites (229). Stowe apparently does not want her black characters to appear as more intelligent than whites because this would appear unrealistic. Instead, she imbues the enslaved with an innate understanding of the Bible, foregoing the need to read at all while whites are not so fortunate: "perhaps it was with a foresight of their [white] peculiar character and dominant position in the earth, that God gave the Bible to them in the fervent language and with the glowing imagery of the more susceptible and passionate oriental races" (*A Key* 46). Stowe subverts the real-life treatment of slaves, as they were in fact forbidden to be taught to read and write. Slaveholders were afraid that enslaved might use those abilities to secretly plan escapes or possibly revolt. Having African Americans be innately pious is a convenient way for Stowe to bypass that inability to read, and seemingly turns their oppression into having benevolent results. Ironically, Tom's piousness was well liked by some Southerners because of this benevolence that oppression caused. As Arthur Riss points out, slavery apologists argued that Tom's behavior was the result of his enslavement, which made slavery a "positive good" in their view (520). Even staunch abolitionists like Thomas Wentworth Higginson admitted that "if it is the normal tendency of bondage to produce saints like Uncle Tom, let us offer ourselves at auction immediately," illustrating how unrealistic Stowe's portrayal of Tom's piousness was deemed to be (550).

By glorifying Uncle Tom, Stowe misrepresents the hardships of actual slaves. Though she writes that Tom "saw enough of abuse and misery to make him sick and weary," Stowe nevertheless primarily takes a more optimistic approach that is quite incongruous with the

suffering slaves had to go through (500). Uncle Tom is seen as being exemplary, having a "full [. . .] gentle, domestic heart" which "has been a peculiar characteristic of his unhappy race" (162). At the beginning of the novel Tom also seems perfectly content at the Shelby plantation. He loves his master and especially his mistress as if they were family – in fact, the idea that slaves belonged to the plantation family was also a well-known pro-slavery argument. It does not matter to Tom whether his owners are kind like the Shelbys or Augustine St. Clare, or whether they are evil, like Simon Legree. Tom particularly loves little Eva St. Clare, hardly getting away from her side when she turns ill, and being utterly distraught when she dies.

Tom's trusting character is perceived as a positive quality, even when he has every reason to be distrusting. While the Shelbys and Augustine St. Clare and his daughter Eva are good to Tom, speak of him as family, and St. Clare promise him his freedom, he is ultimately sold without much hesitation when it is financially necessary, or again when St. Clare dies. Yet, no harsh rebukes follow from Tom himself. He does not even speak ill of his final master, Legree, regardless of the fact that he abuses Tom. Even in his dying moments Tom declares to be willing to do anything for him: "Mas'r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save ye, I'd give ye my heart's blood; and, if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I'd give 'em freely, as the Lord gave his for me" (585). Tom's moral beliefs make him more concerned about the state of Legree's soul than about his own life.

Tom's passive resistance, in those few scenes where he resists the oppression he is subjected to, which I will discuss in detail later, stands diametrically opposed to the active resistance that George Harris, a fellow slave, advocates. The latter is adamant in fighting for his freedom. George is also convinced that he is "a man as much as [his owner] is" and a better one, in fact (60). Curtis Evans ascribes George's arrogance and strong will to his

Anglo-Saxon blood (511). Because George is half-white he does not "[submit] to the divine" as Tom does, even though he does eventually convert (511). Stowe's attitude toward active resistance becomes understandable when viewed through the sociopolitical lens of her time. There had been several slave uprisings, the most threatening of which was Nat Turner's slave revolt of 1831. Cases like these increased public concern about what slaves could do if freed. The presumed physical strength of black men made white people even more scared. Stowe reacts to that fear by having slaves be meek, passive, and above all, pious. Enslaved characters who appear wicked or aggressive, or clamor for resistance are ultimately transformed or converted into pious Christians, often under the benevolent influence of Tom, the most pious of them all. Faith and benevolence are the strengths of the African race, in Stowe's view, so most of her characters are eventually converted and drop their angry facade, regardless of how suddenly it happens in the novel.

Tom's passive behavior is understandable as Stowe wants to distance her black character from the more aggressive slaves that were feared in real-life, as well as to make him into a martyr of sorts. Tom's behavior is nevertheless problematic as it robs him of agency. Augustine St. Clare promises to emancipate him and though Tom never receives his freedom from him, he never complains or becomes angry about it. The only time Tom resists is when he refuses to follow the order that Legree gives him to flog his fellow slave Cassy: "the poor crittur's sick and feeble; 't would be downright cruel, and it's what I never will do, nor begin to. Mas'r, if you mean to kill me, kill me; but, as to my raising my hand agin any one here, I never shall,—I'll die first!" (409). Tom similarly refuses to tell Legree the details of the slaves' plan to escape (583). Tom's only resistance is passive, as he refuses to follow orders when it hurts others, but remains passive when he himself is hurt. He does not try to prevent his own death and ends up forgiving Sambo and Quimbo, who are ordered to flog him: "Sartin, we 's been doin' a drefful wicked thing!" Sambo confesses, while Tom forgives both

him and Quimbo with all his heart (587). Tom's passivity receives more authorial approval than the active resistance of George Harris. While Stowe also applauds slaves who escape, like Eliza and George, as certain doom "nerves the African, naturally patient, timid and unenterprising, with heroic courage," she nevertheless disapproves of active and physical resistance (164). George is rewarded for his rebellious behavior with freedom, but that is because he seeks to keep his own family intact – an important value in the novel which I will discuss later, regarding Stowe's belief that people of the same race should stay together.

Representing Slaves as Children

The belief that black people were inherently childlike was very common, especially among those who subscribed to the racialist tradition (Fredrickson 102). This perceived characteristic was informed by the racialist belief that black people had a limited intelligence compared with whites (Caldwell 253). The idea that black people were viewed as intellectually inferior resulted in slaves being portrayed as childlike, though Stowe applies those racialist characteristics because she views them to be benevolent. After all, the romantic racialist belief she adheres to connects being childlike to being more pure and innocent.

Topsy's transformation from the mischievous "goblin" to pious Christian follows all the stereotypes of romantic racialism. Initially she appears to be the least intelligent of the black slaves, as reflected in her use of vernacular speech, which was commonly used in representations of blacks as a sign of limited education and general ignorance. Topsy is an example of the "pickaninny" stereotype, a dark-skinned child with hair that stood up in all directions and exhibiting juvenile behavior (Bernstein 35). Topsy's behavior is used as a point of discussion between the pro- and anti-slavery characters in the St. Clare household. Both sides agree that she is an impetuous child. As Marie St. Clare sarcastically says to Ophelia, who tries to teach Topsy to read: "you see how much good [teaching her to read] does. Topsy

is the worst creature I ever saw!" (385). Stowe furthermore describes Topsy's grin as one that "looked so goblin-like, that, if Miss Ophelia had been at all nervous, she might have fancied that she had got hold of some sooty gnome from the land of Diablerie" (355). Stowe's descriptions of black people's physical characteristics, which are often compared to those of animals or otherworldly creatures, are dehumanizing and therefore another instance of the racism inherent in her portrayal of slavery.

Ophelia, the family's Northern cousin who is critical of slavery, is tasked with educating Topsy and quickly becomes exasperated with her, saying that the child's incorrigible behavior is due to her "wicked heart" (409). Ophelia knows full well that Topsy is not a bad child and that teaching her requires patience on her own part, but she cannot help being frustrated with her. Topsy comes to believe that she is such a sinner that nobody "can't do nothin' with me" (411). In the end, it is little Eva who enables Topsy to become a better person. Once Eva shows Topsy some affection by hugging her and saying "Poor child, *I* love you!" Topsy changes (409). Eva is the first white person to be kind to Topsy, instead of abusing her as her previous owners used to do or threatening her with violence, as the other white people in the St. Clare household do when they feel exasperated (417).

Topsy can then sentimentally convert to Christianity, a process that is complete when little Eva passes away: "the callous indifference was gone; there was now sensibility, hope, desire, and the striving for good,—a strife irregular, interrupted, suspended oft, but yet renewed again" (440). Her conversion shows that even seemingly wicked people can be saved, especially when, as is the case with Topsy, the slaves' "wickedness" is caused by the abusive treatment of their former owners (409). However, the ease with which Topsy is converted shows the romantic racialist belief that black people are naturally more inclined to religion than whites. This is especially relevant in comparison with Augustine St. Clare's attempted conversion after his daughter passes away. He promises Eva that he will convert

and that he will set Tom free, yet he postpones the conversion and dies before he can do so. Augustine, because he is white and therefore not as morally good as Uncle Tom and the other slaves – and possibly also because he has been corrupted by the system of slavery – hesitates to act quickly, which results in more suffering for Tom. As Marie St. Clare, his wife, is not converted, Tom's suffering continues, as he is sold again for financial gain.

Yet, Stowe offers religion as a tool so powerful that even a creature as unruly as Topsy can be saved and loved by others. However, she seems to be unaware of the discrepancy between the supposed racial superiority that slaves have with regards to their religious disposition and the way in which she describes Topsy's physical appearance in language that is anything but exalted, calling her "goblin-like" and "monkey" (440, 364). Part of this dialogue is deliberately used at the expense of Ophelia, who is actually used by Stowe to show the racial prejudice of Northern abolitionists Stowe knew. While Ophelia orates to anyone about the horrors of slavery, all stories from hearsay, she herself has "always had a prejudice against negroes," as St. Clare points out to her (410). However, because Ophelia only alters her behavior once Topsy alters her own, it comes across not so much as learning to love a child like Topsy despite her behavior, but rather that black people need to alter their disposition for them to be loved by white people. Stowe's depiction of Topsy remains problematic in that regard.

Salvation for the Slaves

Sambo and Quimbo, the slaves of slaveholder Simon Legree, the villain of the novel, are most representative of the novel's unrealistic power of conversion, as Stowe even allows these men to receive salvation by Stowe. Initially, Sambo and Quimbo seemingly act cruelly purely out of spite against Tom. While it is clear to the reader that they have been corrupted by their cruel master, it is only revealed at the end of the novel that Legree intimated to them

that Tom would become the new slave driver instead of them (583). It is Legree's manipulation that makes them jealous of their fellow slaves, yet they do nothing to resolve that hatred until at the very end: "Sambo and Quimbo cordially hated each other; the plantation hands, one and all, cordially hated them; and, by playing off one against another, [Legree] was pretty sure, through one or the other of the three parties, to get informed of whatever was on foot in the place" (493). While Sambo and Quimbo are corrupted through Legree, their childlike gullibility, which Stowe seems to infer is responsible for their easy corruptibility, reiterates the enslaved men's racialist character. It takes Tom's continued forgiveness of them for them to see the error of their ways (586). Only when they have flogged him nearly to death do they ask him about this Jesus they have been mocking until that moment: "'O, Tom! do tell us who is Jesus, anyhow?' said Sambo;—'Jesus, that's been a standin' by you so, all this night!—Who is he?'" (587). Their innate piety, buried below the corrupted surface, resurfaces and they want to be taught about Jesus.

Historically, slaves were also forced to whip other slaves, as their masters sought to sow distrust and fear among the slaves themselves (Riss 520). This made it difficult, if not impossible for slaves to form a unified front against their white owners, making it less likely for them to rebel against their masters (520). Stowe uses this principle to portray Legree's two loyal slaves in the novel, who are clearly indoctrinated by and terrified of their irreligious master. Their lack of religious faith and hateful and cruel behavior make their representation appear to be in conflict with the romantic aspects of the racialist tradition that Stowe subscribes to, as they are initially denied – and are revealed to be unfamiliar with – the innate Christianity she believes makes black people so kind-hearted. Yet, as they have been corrupted by the immoral system of slavery, as happens with so many other characters in the novel, the sudden reversal and redemption makes sense, if only from a romantic racialist point of view. Stowe sentimentally portrays all slaves as victims that are being corrupted by the

system, so despite the awful things they might have done while being corrupted, they can and do receive salvation. However, by making the conversion so sudden it appears as if the slaves who are willing to convert have no real grasp of what religion entails, making their conversion appear superficial despite their assumed innate spirituality. Moreover, the sudden conversion makes it appear as if life on the plantation was more romantic and simpler than it was in real life. Stowe seems to misunderstand the gravity of Sambo and Quimbo's behavior, who, after all, whip Tom to death gleefully, by allowing them to convert so easily. Their sudden conversion makes sense only if put in the romantic racialist tradition, as well as in the context of the sentimental novel: the characters are considered to be innately good and their hatred and cruelty are the logical result of living in a corruptive institution. They are absolved of their sins through God's divine grace, working through the Christ figure Tom.

Legree, the evil slave owner who orders Tom to be flogged to death, is offered a similar conversion, but he rejects it. Legree, who is utterly superstitious, believes that the ghost of his mother, whose morality and religion he rejected in his youth, and the ghosts of the slaves he tortured to death might come back to haunt him. Stowe shows, once again, the power of faith, as even Legree has a moment where his superstition wavers. When Tom tells him that he is afraid for Legree's soul, Stowe describes the latter's feeling "like a strange snatch of heavenly music, heard in the lull of a tempest, this burst of feeling made a moment's blank pause" (Evans 409). However, his superstition and his Anglo-Saxon blood make him unable to convert, no matter how hard Tom urges him to do so (409). Legree remains unregenerate, unlike his slaves.

Colonization

In the epilogue, many of the enslaved characters receive their freedom and, instead of trying to build a life in the United States, move to Liberia, an American colony in Africa.

Stowe's implicit view of family within the framework of romantic racialism means that slaves can indeed be free, but have to stick to members of their own race instead of belonging to any artificial familial construction in the way Southerners justified slavery, which meant that they should move to a colony in Africa when they were emancipated (Koenig 288). Colonization was commonly promoted, though obviously controversial, at the time, even among (white) abolitionists. It was argued that, since the slave trade had originally started with kidnapping Africans, the enslaved belonged on that continent and should go back once they were freed (289). This racialist view excluded the notion that freed slaves could make a life of their own in America, even in the North. The fact that Northern states were hesitant to assimilate freed slaves into their society was ammunition for southern slavery advocates. They argued that Northerners with their "holier-than-thou" attitude had no right to tell the South what to do with their slaves, as they were not willing to take proper care of freed slaves themselves (Otter 20).

By sending the freed characters "back" to Africa, Stowe reinforces the idea that black people constitute an entirely separate race and are unwilling or unable to fend for themselves in America. Stowe makes this argument by, for example, letting George Harris argue in his final letter that "[his] sympathies are not for [his] father's race, but for [his] mother's" (585). His white father's treatment of him as a slave makes him reject everything his father stands for. George's behavior is understandable, but it also opposes Stowe's focus on redemption by letting him distance himself from America because that is where his father came from. In letting George make the argument for going "back" to Africa Stowe makes him deliberately choose for the African heritage that originates from his black mother's side rather than the Anglo-Saxon side of his father (Evans 512). Stowe treats George's African heritage as morally superior, and is also convinced that the best option for them is to move away from the

United States. By using him as a mouthpiece Stowe legitimizes the option of moving the freed slaves to Liberia regardless of what black people themselves wanted.

A year after the novel's publication, Frederick Douglass wrote a letter to Stowe, arguing that colonization only looks "to the removal of the colored people" while black people "are likely to remain" ("Letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe"). Douglass continues to say that "we have grown up with this republic, and I see nothing in her character, or even in the character of the American people as yet, which compels the belief that we must leave the United States" (Douglass). He proposes to set up a type of industrial school, where young black children could get educated and be assimilated into American culture. Douglass was undoubtedly too optimistic regarding the character of the American people, but his point is nevertheless valid.

Furthermore, Stowe ignores that the importation of Africans had been illegal throughout the United States for decades, and that the vast majority of slaves were actually born in the United States after 1808. In order to get new slaves, plantation owners either had to buy them from other American slave owners, or they had to be bred (Baptist 1619). According to Edward E. Baptist, slave owners frequently raped female slaves, possibly also to ensure new slaves being born (1620). In many other instances, slaves were forced to breed among themselves to create new slaves (Sublette and Sublette 49). Stowe acknowledges that practice through George Harris being biracial, yet prefers the neat resolution of racial purity with its racialist advantages. It perpetuates the divide between black and white.

Conclusion

Because Stowe's characters are based on stereotypes that are legitimized by contemporary race theories such as romantic racialism, Stowe's novel mostly confirms the racial presumptions of her white readers. Part of her strategy includes making her enslaved

characters more pious than and thus morally superior to her white characters, which was an attempt to appeal to her readers and to make black people seem less threatening than they were believed to be. Because Stowe's approach was successful as the novel was widely read throughout the United States, the black narrative was suppressed in favor of the romantic racialism introduced by Stowe. While Stowe's opposition to slavery was undoubtedly sincere, by subscribing to essentialist views of race and perpetuating racial stereotypes she only contributed to the notion of white supremacy in the long run.

Chapter 2: Servitude as a "Necessary *Good*"
In Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*

Slavery apologists furiously attacked Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), deeming it an unnecessary provocation of an age-old tradition in a period in which slavery was already a toxic subject to many people (Hagood 71). Tensions had already run high throughout the preceding years, as events like the Compromise of 1850, which included a renewed and stricter Fugitive Slave Act, led to a strong reaction from abolitionists who viewed it as a pro-slavery measure (Jordan-Lake xv). Stowe's novel received such fierce criticisms because it argued that slavery was an immoral institution. As the novel sold countless copies and was read throughout the United States, Southern writers, essayists and authors alike, were quick to defend their beloved institution of slavery as a counteraction. Many of them wrote hateful reviews in periodicals, in which they attacked Stowe for being a sentimental abolitionist and for being a Northerner who dared to impinge on the South's right to own slaves (Hagood 72). Furthermore, they argued, it was unfeminine for a woman to take part in the slavery debate, as women should not get involved in political matters (72).

Some Southern reviewers did – at least in part – concede that horrific events like those described by Stowe did take place. An anonymous slaveholder wrote to the *New York Evening Post* and stated that "whippings to death do occur," because of which he had been "long dissatisfied with the system" (qtd. in Hagood 86). He further challenged the biblical endorsements of slavery and argued that slavery was "not in accordance with what God delights to honor in his creatures" (86). Frederick Law Olmsted, a Northern journalist (and later a famous landscape architect), traveled to the South to interview various citizens shortly after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s publication and "observed that the novel 'sold openly on a Mississippi steamboat,' and a bookseller in Columbia, South Carolina 'complained that he

could not keep up with demand for it'" (98). Olmstead's anecdotes illustrate how, despite the controversy and statements to the contrary, some Southerners still allowed the book to be sold and even agreed with the novel. However, the Southerners agreeing with the novel's condemnation of slavery were in the minority (86). Most of these comments were made anonymously when published, or were only made in private. They seemed to have been wary to speak out openly against the angry response from their fellow Southerners.

In addition to the many reviews published by Southern slavery advocates, several pro-slavery novels that directly attacked Stowe's abolitionist message were published between 1852 and the beginning of the Civil War. These so-called "anti-Tom" novels were not so much literature as propaganda efforts, intended to fight back directly against the anti-slavery message of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by writing about the benevolence of slavery in a similar sentimental manner as Stowe had done (MacKethan *Plantation Romances*). By reframing the Southern plantation as a safe and good place for slaves, these authors attempted to establish a new view of the South, focusing on the South's virtues and the North's own weaknesses (Dowty 28). About two dozen of these anti-Tom novels were published, with Mary Henderson Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*, which was published shortly after *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, selling the most copies. To put her novel's success in perspective, it sold about 30,000 copies in its first year in comparison to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s 300,000 in that same period (Winship).

The sentimental description of the plantation setting of Eastman's novel, especially in relation to the similar setting used in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was partially responsible for the relative success of *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*. Eastman portrays the plantation, as did many of her fellow anti-Tom writers, as an idyllic and familial setting in which slave and slave-owner alike live happily together as one large family. Eastman subscribes to what Joy Jordan-Lake describes as a "theology of whiteness," which she defines as the "manipulation of

religious language and ideology to augment wealthy whites' economic hegemony in order to denigrate nonwhites and justify their subjugation" (65).

My close-reading of Eastman's novel, drawn on Jordan-Lake's "theology of whiteness" as well as her other writing on pro-slavery fiction, will focus on the interconnection of the various black mammy figures, disobedient slaves, and white authority figures in the white hierarchy of the plantation. I will illustrate how the novel justifies white supremacy and the oppression of African Americans, as Eastman replaces the black horrific experience under slavery with one that originated from a white perspective that advocates submission. Eastman does so even if that means that white women also have to submit to the white male hegemony. She in favor of slavery by saying that it is simultaneously a God-given duty – even calling it a "curse" – and yet also beneficial to slaves. She presents this contradictory line of arguing in an attempt at conveniently removing any responsibility for slavery on the part of the Southern slave-owners. I will contextualize this pro-slavery writing through scholarly articles by Caldwell, Hagood, and Dowty.

The History of Slavery Apology

In response to the increasing influence of the abolitionists, in the 1830s and 40s the white South "began recasting the institution [of slavery] no longer as an agrarian society's regrettable necessity, but rather as an indisputable social good to both master and slave" (Jordan-Lake 5). Most slavery apologists argued that it was good for enslaved people to live and work in a system that was constructed to make the best use of their physical prowess, all so that they could be oppressed even further. Apologists argued that "African-descended slaves labored [best] under the protection of a class of European-descended owners in a stable, hierarchical, and fundamentally benevolent social milieu" (Schermerhorn 1010). Some slavery apologists reasoned that slaves were untrustworthy, so they needed supervision by

whites in order to thrive (Caldwell 253). The submissiveness that was part of their racialist view of blacks directly opposes that idea, yet contradictorily both attitudes were used to justify slavery. The slaves' submissive behavior was mostly emphasized in anti-Tom novels, as the authors could not depict the whipping of slaves because slavery was supposed to be benevolent. The slaves are represented in plantation fiction as enjoying working on plantations much more than the experience slaves had while working in the North, so "their" slaves could be differentiated from the more aggressive slaves abolitionists might have heard about (131). It also enabled advocates to explain why slavery had been abolished in the North (131). Also, slavery advocates reasoned that black people were much more acclimatized to the warmer weather of the South than to the coldness of the Northern states (Caldwell 131). Simply stating that African Americans were slaves because it was God-ordained was not enough; slavery apologists needed to treat them paternalistically as children and pretend they knew what was best for the enslaved people in order to have full control over them.

This strengthened belief in slavery as a positive good was connected to a renewed focus on history and tradition. Countless great statesmen like Washington, Jefferson, and Madison had been slaveholders, which Southerners used to call out abolitionists for believing they were better than these great men in American history. By focusing on the fact that slavery had been an institution for centuries in America and throughout the world, slavery apologists could project slavery as a continuously abiding institution, as well as making abolitionists appear unpatriotic by going against the practices of men like Washington and Jefferson.

Presenting the institution of slavery as an age-old tradition fit in well with the nostalgic view of plantations that began to be popularized around the same time. As the debate between the states about slavery began to erupt, people began to hanker for simpler times, before slavery was such a controversial issue. As Alan Dowty argues, as "human

thought [. . .] invariably lags behind social reality" the South confined itself "by a self-image [of benevolent slave-ownership] whose relation to reality, though still relevant, was slowly becoming less so" (27). In effect, the belief that Southern plantations worked in this fictional manner was stronger than reality.

Because of the general Northern attitude towards slavery, the Southern way of life began to be portrayed more and more as this idyllic setting to emphasize the contrast between the Southern agrarian way of life and the industrial economy of the North (26). Anti-Tom writers also wanted to make the plantation narrative their own again, as they believed that Stowe had appropriated the plantation for the setting of her anti-slavery novel (Moss 105). Southern slave apologists were eager to distance their way of life as much as possible from that of the anti-slavery advocates, regardless of whether it was entirely factual or not. As slaves were also used – albeit in a limited capacity – in the South's urban industry, slavery advocates had to ignore this in order to contrast their peaceful plantation setting with the North (Dowty 28).

The plantation was framed in what Jordan-Lake describes as a "theology of whiteness," a "framework that manipulates religious language and ideology to support the economic interests of a white patriarchal culture, including the creation of a deity in its own image: white, male, indifferent to injustice, and zealous in punishing transgressions across the racial, gender, and class lines it has drawn" (xvi). Jordan-Lake argues that the planters' society used "theopolitical" arguments to make the "curse" of slavery God's responsibility, which conveniently absolved the plantation owners from any blame and responsibility for the institution (xvii). Eastman argues the same: Mr. Chapman, a Southern gentleman in the novel, states that "we have been left with the curse of slavery upon us" and only God "may see fit to remove it from us" (93). Furthermore, if God was the arbiter on these political issues, white plantation owners could justify that they themselves became god and ruler of their own

plantations, applying the patriarchy inherent in Christian religion to their own plantations (Jordan-Lake xvi).

Anti-Tom authors, even more so than other pro-slavery writers like Calhoun, refuted the terrible conditions on these plantations as portrayed by Stowe and other abolitionists by representing the plantation as an idyllic society, a safe haven for all who lived and worked on it (Dowty 26). The main issue with these narratives is that they directly contradict the information readers already had at the time. These novels tended to minimize the slave trade and attempted to refute the malnourishment of enslaved children, despite the fact that dozens of former slaves had provided witness accounts of these wrongs in their narratives or the fact that these events were witnessed by Southern citizens as well (Dowty 32, Rathbun and Steckel 220). By portraying plantation scenes without any violence or resistance – if there is no resistance, there is no need for violence to be used – pro-slavery advocates create a narrative in which they distance themselves, as slave owners or citizens condoning the practice, of any slave revolts or other types of violence that rebellious slaves engaged in. Whenever this occurred, this narrative suggested, it is solely the responsibility of the slaves and not of the owners themselves.

Mary Eastman, born in Warrington, Virginia, in 1818, was one of the writers who wrote a pro-Southern counter-narrative against Stowe's novel (Hunter 49). Eastman came from a large planter family and lived in Washington, D.C. with her husband when she wrote the novel. Eastman's novel showed her Southern pride for plantation life, although she had not lived on one for several years. In fact, many of the anti-Tom novels were written by people who had grown up in the South but had since been living elsewhere. This physical removal from plantation life no doubt was one reason it was depicted as more idyllic than it was in actuality. As Eastman lived in Washington, D.C. at the time, it is no surprise that the planter family in her novel takes a trip to the capital, possibly because it enabled Eastman to

include anecdotal evidence of freed slaves acting in an unruly manner. It also gives Eastman the benefit of contrasting everything that she perceives is wrong with big cities – an abundance of evil abolitionists and freed slaves walking about without having proper respect for white citizens – with the beauty and romance of plantation life.

In *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*, Eastman portrays a Virginia plantation family who live a relatively comfortable life. The slaves are aware that their duty is in servitude and are downright dismissive of anyone who argues otherwise. The white characters are embroiled in plots that are surprisingly romantic for an author who calls out Stowe for her sentimentality. A large part of the novel is composed of characters discussing abolitionism, but the main plot concerns Alice and her indecision on who to marry, her fiancé and cousin Arthur, or Walter. As her parents view the bond of blood as strongest, Alice must carry out her duty and choose Arthur, resolving the plot quickly and neatly. The slaves featured in the novel are marginal characters, included to either illustrate how good their lives are on the Weston plantation, or how bad things can happen when a slave falls outside the patriarchal system. The fates of slaves like Susan and Simon, who are ostracized by their masters for running away from the safe plantations, illustrate how dangerous it is to be corrupted by evil abolitionists. Phillis, the main enslaved character, is solely present in the story so she can tell of the greatness of the Weston family, and show how well she has been treated by them throughout the years.

As Jordan-Lake points out, the anti-Tom novels written by men praised the social hierarchy as a good thing because they needed this hierarchy to remain (xvi). Eastman's approach is slightly more muddled, as she approves of the white male hegemony that is responsible for the subjugation of slaves, while she simultaneously tries to attack that same patriarchy for oppressing white women. As such, Eastman sentimentally portrays the white characters as victims of the "curse" of slavery, while contradictorily arguing that "a man born

a slave, in a country where slavery is allowed by law, should feel the obligation of doing his duty" (275).

Submitting Oneself to be the Perfect Servant

Phillis, the slave character who appears most often in the novel, is "Eastman's ideal mammy" as she "relinquishes her own desires – a desire for personal freedom and selfhood – to serve" (Hunter 61). White women were relegated to the inner sphere of the household, and black enslaved women were relegated to taking care of them and their white children. Eastman frames this service as being motivated by the slaves' admiration for the white family. Phillis looks up to her owners, and she is "constantly chiding her children for using [the other servants'] expressions, and [tries] to keep them in the house with white people as much as possible, [so] that they might acquire good manners" (104). While slaves could obviously never become as dignified as the members of the white family, they could at least try to be so by emulating the whites' good behavior and become better people as a result.

Phillis is what would become the "Mammy" stereotype, a character whose sole purpose is to show affection to her white children and family, and to be in service of white people (Jordan-Lake 4). While Phillis is referred to by her actual name as opposed to "Mammy," as would happen in later iterations of the Mammy figure, she is very much this stereotype (4). Phillis is regarded as a good person only because she always performs her duties to the family. Calling slaves "Aunt" or "Uncle" was an attempt to sentimentalize the slaves' role on the plantation, as it made them appear part of the family (Hunter 15). Later, plantation writers would remove the name and only referred to female slaves as Mammy, probably to further dehumanize them (Thurber 96).

Though the role of the Mammy would become much larger in plantation literature later in the nineteenth century, she was somewhat rooted in social reality. Childrearing would

indeed often be the duty of female slaves, but those duties would often be performed by younger enslaved women who could rear the white babies simultaneously with their own children, rather than the older "Aunt" or "Mammy" as familiar from the stereotype (Rathbun and Steckel 220). As white plantation inhabitants did often remember those who cared for them fondly, they possibly assumed the feeling was mutual, even if that fondness would not always have been reciprocated by a slave (Hunter 50). Phillis's actual children are as a result of less importance than the white children she raises, because the "family" that Eastman mentions only refers to the white members (Jordan-Lake 70). The real-life practice of female slaves being forced to nurse the white children in lieu of their own – who often suffered of malnutrition as a result – is being treated as choosing the white members of their "family" over their own children out of sheer devotion.

Although she is a character in an anti-Tom novel, Aunt Phillis has a lot in common with Uncle Tom. Both are held up as an example to the other characters because of their piousness, including the white characters. Both Phillis and Tom are respected by their kind masters because of their piety and loyalty, and their deaths are viewed as tragic. Both characters also reflect their authors' sentimental and racialist views. Whereas Tom, who is whipped to death on a field, dies as a martyr, showing his passive resistance and the power of the Christian faith to his fellow slaves and his evil master Legree, Phillis dies quite comfortably, surrounded by her white "family" so that Eastman can demonstrate how well-treated slaves are. Phillis does not hesitate to leave her children with her master, Mr. Weston, instead of desiring them become free: "My children are well off [. . .] they have a good master; if they serve him and God faithfully they will be sure to do well" (259). Eastman believes slavery is benevolent, yet also writes that "it was [the slaves'] duty to work in the condition in which God had placed them," which leaves them little choice (215). Eastman uses the template of Uncle Tom to subvert the abolitionist message of his author, but only

makes the comparison more confusing by muddying her own argument as she believes service to the white family is simultaneously the slaves' duty, as well as a sign of the benevolence of the institution.

Eastman's attempt at connecting white and black women's duties is most apparent in Alice's storyline. Alice Weston, the daughter of the plantation owner, is in love both with Arthur, her fiancé and cousin, and Walter, even though the latter is not "so noble, so generous, so gifted with all that is calculated to inspire affection" as Arthur (143). Alice needs to carry out her duty, which is to get married to Arthur, rather than stay in a passionate relationship with Walter (Hunter 66). Phillis's tragic decline, resulting in her death, is intended as an echo of this, as both women are forced to make sacrifices in order to appease the hierarchy and do what is expected of them. However difficult the hardships of slaves might be, in Eastman's view they are of a similar nature as those white plantation women have to face. Eastman argues that "Christian men and *women* should find enough to occupy them in [. . .] an undoubted sphere of duty" (emphasis mine) and even concedes that she does not "deny the evils of slavery" and wishes that "every human being that God has made were free" (279, 277). Eastman so desperately wants to equate the hardships of white and black women that she even agrees that slavery can be evil in this instance. By blaming God for allowing slavery to exist she can also easily criticize the system without taking any responsibility for it. Yet, this also opposes her benevolent portrayal of slavery throughout her novel.

There is no doubt that white women also suffered hardships during the antebellum period, especially on plantations. White women were responsible for the household, and had to work with enslaved women they believed were a threat, as men frequently had sexual relationships with those slaves – often involuntarily on the slaves' part (Chesnut 168). The relationship between these plantation wives and their slaves was often problematic, as it was based on abuse and mistrust. Because white women needed the slaves to cooperate so that the

household would run smoothly, they were strict and frequently abusive in order to make sure that their slaves remained submissive (Hunter 9). As a result, some slaves attempted to poison their mistresses or masters as a desperate means of resistance or to let the abuse stop (Fox-Genovese 306). One female slave even attempted to murder an infant by putting ground glass into its milk (306). These instances gave many slaveholders reason enough to fear slaves, yet Eastman ignores that information as she tries to sell her narrative of merry codependence.

Disloyal Slaves

Disloyal slaves do appear on Eastman's plantation, even if they are treated well by their masters. They are characteristic of Eastman's view of slaves as being naturally disruptive and lazy if left to their own devices. For example, Aunt Peggy is shown to be a bitter old mammy who does not do her duty for the family anymore but sits around being drunk all day. Aunt Peggy "cared nothing about religion" and when she is read from the Bible "there were no good impressions left on her mind" (147). Peggy is further stigmatized by her appearance. She is described as a witch who has "long, skinny hands and arms," a "gloomy, fitful temper," a "haughty countenance," and a "mass of bushy white hair" (147); "[a]nd who that had seen her, could forget that one tooth projecting over her thick underlip[?]" (47). The other slaves avoid her, thinking that she is a witch, which reiterates the superstitious beliefs African Americans were thought to have, as well as Peggy's pagan lack of faith.

Peggy also talks of the horrific journey she was forced to undertake when she was kidnapped and brought to America. Discussing these events would be out of place in a pro-slavery novel, which rarely addressed the violence that is inherent in slavery (Hunter 76). However, Eastman emphasizes that Peggy was brought from Africa by a black captain and his crew. She suggests that black men in Africa treated slaves much worse than whites did, contrasting it with the kind treatment of slaves within the South.

Peggy's faithlessness primarily serves as a contrast to the pious Phillis. Yet, when Peggy dies she is "redeemed from the slavery of sin, and her regenerate soul looks forward to the rest that remaineth to the people of God" as she accepts that the "dispensation of God has placed her in a state of servitude" (153). Having fulfilled the duty that the curse of Canaan has put on her, Peggy is still redeemed, making piousness in life not all that important as one can still achieve redemption. Furthermore, while Eastman criticizes Stowe by calling her portrayal of plantation life "a book of romance," Peggy shares her superstitious nature with several characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (271). Such characters, like Legree and the slaves Sambo and Quimbo, are also offered the choice of redemption. The latter two take that option gratefully, as does Peggy. She cannot be punished for her behavior as masters are portrayed as benevolent and charitable. Her lack of faith and general unwillingness to serve are in stark contrast with the idealized slave Phillis, however, and because of that she is mocked by the other characters in the novel.

Susan, a runaway slave, actually suffers for being deemed disobedient and disloyal by the other characters. Instead of performing her duty by caring for the family's newborn child, she is persuaded by abolitionists to run away from her plantation to be safe in the North. When it is revealed she has no money and did not bring her mistress's purse along, the abolitionists become agitated: "'It's not stealing,' said the Abolitionist. 'Haven't you been a slaving of yourself all your life for her, and I guess you've a right to be paid for it'" (59). It is obvious that the abolitionists are only after her money and do not care about her well-being, as opposed to her white family on the plantation. Susan is forced to work to pay the abolitionists, and feels as if she "had been transferred from one master to another," having to "[cook] and [wash] for ten in family; [clean] the whole house, and [do] all the chores" (60). Susan receives less money for her services than the white servants because whites, according to this unnamed Northern woman who she has to work for, are simply better at their jobs: "the

idea of a nigger wanting over four dollars a month, when you've been working all your life, too, for nothing at all" is preposterous to this woman, who adds that she should work for less for her friends, the abolitionists (60). In Eastman's view it is they who are the real racists, and who care only about exploiting these innocent creatures.

Even though Susan is betrayed by abolitionists, she is not allowed to come back, as running away from kind masters is considered a betrayal on the slave's part, especially when the white baby she was supposed to care for passes away. As Mrs. Moore, one of the plantation owners the Westons meet in Washington, D.C., asserts, "she deserves it for deserting her kind mistress at a time when she most needed her services" (66). Mr. Weston argues the same in later in the novel: "it serves them right; they knew they were not free, and that it was their duty to work in the condition in which God had placed them. They have nobody to blame but themselves" (216). While the abolitionists are portrayed as diabolical conmen, it is seemingly still the slaves' responsibility when something happens to their families if the abolitionists coerce the slaves into running away.

Even worse, runaway slaves are considered to be an actual threat, as the family's baby does not survive (Hunter 53). The fact that Susan was tricked by abolitionists gives no respite for the neglect of her duties. She receives the sole blame for the baby's untimely death, despite the fact that she would not have been the only one present who could care for a newborn child. As Eastman views these women as tightly connected through their duties in the household, Susan's behavior is not viewed as an escape from subjugation but only as betrayal from the whites' point of view. As the slaves' only value comes from being in service to white women, if those slaves run away from their safe plantation lives, they betray their family. The white family becomes the real victim because of their dependence upon slavery, and therefore the runaway slaves are not allowed to return. Yet, other slaves like Aunt Peggy

or Uncle Bacchus who seem just as useless as Susan is – or even more so – are allowed to remain on the plantation. Loyalty to their white masters is the slaves' most important virtue.

This stands in contrast with how Stowe represents her female characters. Eliza also runs away – an aggressive form of resistance that Stowe otherwise seems to disapprove of, given her praise of Tom's passive qualities – yet her escape is validated by Stowe as she runs away to spare her son from being sold down South and thus to prevent the separation of her family. Both authors try to appeal to their readers by sentimentally casting their characters inside a familial context. Eastman's sentimental approach is likely to have been more favored by female readers than the many pro-slavery novels written by men (Dowty 36). The difference is that Stowe argues that families should consist of members of the same race, which results in her having her characters move to Liberia to live together voluntarily, while Eastman's families consist of the plantation families that include white people and their slaves. Eastman, despite her rare objection that she has "no wish to uphold slavery," argues that slaves are only worthwhile when they perform their God-given duties (278).

Ultimately, both Stowe and Eastman try to portray their slave characters as heroic and morally just. Phillis's loyalty and submission to her white family is the reason she gets to go to heaven, as she has fulfilled her earthly duties, and Tom has as well. The difference is that Tom tries to help his fellow slaves and his slave owners by converting them to Christianity and is thus morally superior, while Phillis's most defining characteristic is her utter loyalty to her masters, which makes her submissiveness more important. Despite Eastman's criticisms of the patriarchy, only full compliance with it allows slaves to be considered meaningful in any way.

Eastman's views on hierarchy are also visible in her portrayal of black marriage, in this case between Bacchus and Phillis. Bacchus is the inferior partner in marriage as he drinks, is lazy, and is superstitious. Bacchus exhibits stereotypical traits ascribed to blacks

that whites want to eradicate. Phillis chides him constantly for this as she, in her admiration for her white family, wants to emulate white behavior. Bacchus's drinking, his initial refusal to be taught from the Bible, and his overall inability to work adequately are the opposite of Phillis's behavior, which explains why he is made fun of by the other characters. When Bacchus thinks he sees a ghost, he is afraid of being ridiculed by the others – slave and slaveholder alike – as the ghost is more than likely a cat. Phillis offers to keep quiet about this incident, arguing that "I shan't say nothing about it as long as you keep sober" (175). In keeping with the sentimentality exhibited throughout the novel, he keeps his promise after this incident. Subjugating himself to the hierarchy means losing these stereotypical traits. When he succeeds in doing so, even Bacchus can become a better person and work more diligently for his master. Bacchus does indeed become a loyal house slave to Mr. Weston. While Eastman criticizes the gender hierarchy somewhat by having the wife in this relationship be the superior partner, both of them are ultimately subject to the "theology of whiteness."

The importance of hierarchy and submission to it is made explicit as characters who do not fit within this patriarchy are readily mocked when they are outside of it. During the family's visit to Washington, D.C. they come across a well-dressed freedman walking on the sidewalk. Eastman's omniscient narrator states that "several persons looked back to wonder and laugh at this strange figure" whose "dress – indeed his whole appearance – was absurd" (231). Then, the "colored man" comes upon a white man walking toward him from the opposite direction (231). When neither is inclined to give way to the other, the white man, "with the greatest coolness and presence of mind, doubled up his fist and [gave] the colored Adonis two blows with it [and] laid him full length upon the pavement" (233). Mr. Weston amusedly declares that "it served him right; for that the negroes were getting intolerable" (233). In this scene Eastman shows what happens when a black man literally refuses to go out of the way of a white man. In her view there is no situation in which a black character has

equal standing to a white character, and she illustrates this to her readers by letting a black man with the attitude of "who says I am not as good as anybody on this avenue?" get hit for thinking so (231). The fact that the freedman does not submit to the white man is reason enough for ridiculing him. Both Mr. Weston and Bacchus proceed to state that their slaves are much better behaved than this man. Anyone who does not submit to servitude to white families is considered to be inferior to everyone else.

Justifying Slavery through Authority Figures

Eastman's weak criticisms of the white male hegemony are further negated by her reverence for the white men in her novel. Mr. Weston, the plantation owner, is considered a true patriarch as he cares about and knows what is best for all the characters. Eastman uses Mr. Weston as the authority figure in order to propagate her views on abolitionism and the virtues of slavery. Mr. Weston claims that slaves are "in their natural condition" in the South, and he laments "how worthless, how degraded they are" when "they imbibe these ridiculous notions" of abolition (234). Mr. Weston's authority as patriarch legitimizes Eastman's view of abolitionists and her claim that Northerners were worse in their treatment of "wage slaves."

Mr. Weston's authority results in the suppression of the voice and autonomy of his slaves. In compliance with the pro-slavery argument that slaves were treated much better than Stowe and her fellow abolitionists made it out to be, Mr. Weston tells Phillis that he has "thought several times [. . .] of offering to set your children free at my death, and I will do so if you wish" (259). This offer could be considered a subversion of the white plantation hegemony, which would mean that slaves had autonomy and deliberately chose to remain in servitude. If that were the case, slaveholders are absolved of any blame, not in the least because Mr. Weston offers to set her children free only after his own death. Yet, he manipulates Phillis by saying that her boys would have to leave Virginia and that "they have

no more rights than they have as slaves with us, and they have no one to care for them when they are sick or in trouble" (260). Phillis has to concur, and Mr. Weston immediately states that he also thought that having her sons remain enslaved would be the best course of action (260). He merely gives her the illusion of choice and by manipulating her he is able to remove responsibility for her actions while still getting the result he wants.

Similarly, Arthur Weston, Mr. Weston's son, has several discussions with abolitionist Abel Johnson, who is described as having "at present a severe attack of the Abolition fever, and he could not talk upon any other subject" (176). Even though this topic is "very disagreeable to Arthur," the latter still indulges the abolitionist (176). Arthur's primary existence within the narrative – apart from being the fiancé of Alice in the book's romantic plot – seems to consist of dismissing abolitionists, and he does so as easily as one expects to read in a pro-slavery novel. Arthur starts off his diatribe against abolitionists by saying that he "could bring forward quite a respectable list [of men] who have died in their beds, in spite of their egregious sin," referring to slavery as a "sin" only sarcastically (75). Arthur then lists the names of "Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Marshall, Calhoun, Henry Clay, and not a few others" (75). The fact that all of these men had owned slaves meant it was perfectly legitimate to continue, and any attempt to thwart this would be considered hypocritical on the part of abolitionists – notwithstanding the fact that a "respectable" man such as John C. Calhoun was primarily known for his stringent defense of slavery to begin with. Arthur further argues that the North "didn't need [slaves] and got rid of them" which allows them to say "stand aside, for I am holier than thou!" (75). These are typical rebuttals of anti-slavery arguments as they removed any responsibility for keeping the system of slavery intact. Furthermore, accusing the North of allowing its factory workers to suffer more than slaves in the South merely implies that the South is only slightly less bad than the North, instead of a genuinely good place for slaves to work in, which undermines Eastman's pro-slavery message.

Demonizing Abolitionism

Eastman portrays the abolitionists as the real villains. By exploiting the kind and easily corruptible slaves, they try to tear apart the Southern "family." The abolitionists "wouldn't let the poor devils rest until they 'duced them to go off" and made them suffer for daring to do so (215). She attempts to subvert the abolitionists' sentimental view of slavery by portraying the abolitionists in her story – apart from Abel – as evil and corrupt, thereby reiterating the sentimental view of the plantation as a good place (Moss 106). Eastman also attempts to recast her enslaved characters as innocent victims who are pawns in the abolitionists' schemes. Yet Eastman also insists that slaves submit to the theology of whiteness, which means that they are solely responsible for what happens if they do not submit, if only to conveniently remove the blame from the white slaveholders. The enslaved do not wish to run away because they are abused on the plantations, because there is believed to be no abuse. Rather, it is because they are corrupted by an evil outside force. That they are then punished for running away is rather incongruous, but according to Eastman they nonetheless have to take full responsibility for their actions.

The oppression of the enslaved continues in the use of language. Eastman lets the abolitionists – as well as the slaves who do not conform to the hierarchy – use hateful epithets and portrays the plantation owners as civilized and good people. The abolitionists are shown to be the true villains in their use of the n-word as opposed to "negro." Eastman uses Bacchus, who seems much more dignified in this scene than in other parts of the novel, to criticize an abolitionist: "we aint much used to being called niggers, sir. We calls ourselves so sometimes, but gentlemen and ladies, sir, mostly calls us colored people, or servants" (205). Yet, this use of oblique language merely serves to display the superiority of Southerners' treatment of blacks. The plantation owners do not, and do not need to, utter the term "slave" or the n-word

when they are referring to the black people living on their plantations because in the South race determines class. Using the euphemism “servant” instead enables them to deny any connotations with the ownership of people (Jordan-Lake 65).

To Southerners, Eastman seems to argue, skin color is almost irrelevant because it is so tightly connected with class. Slaves have to carry out the work they do because they are black, which means they are “cursed” to do so according to the curse of Canaan, and because the subjugation of a weaker class of people has always existed (11). Eastman illustrates this latter point with the following quote, incorrectly attributed to Voltaire: “no legislator of history [has] attempted to abrogate slavery” because “society was so accustomed to this degradation of the species” (15). This is in contrast to Stowe, who uses the color of the slaves’ skin to make them appear beautiful and exotic: for example, she describes Topsy as “one of the blackest of her race,” as having “round shining eyes, glittering as glass beads” (613). Eastman’s language is less racialist than Stowe’s because race is of less importance to her and other slavery apologists, who can justify slavery by means of various other arguments.

In her “Concluding Remarks,” a deliberate echo of Stowe’s epilogue, Eastman directly addresses the “falsehoods” she believes are told in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, occasionally going to ridiculous lengths to dismiss Stowe. For example, she debunks the scene in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* where Emmeline and Cassy, two slaves, talk about how horrible Legree is. Cassie says “I’ve heard screams here that I haven’t been able to get out of my head for weeks and weeks. There’s a place way out down by the quarters, where you can see a black, blasted tree, and the ground all covered with black ashes” (534). It is clear that Stowe talks of slaves being burned alive, yet Eastman rejects this notion. “Reader,” her narrator asserts, “that's just the way a tree appears when it has been struck by lightning” (268). Eastman has “not the slightest doubt that this was the way the mistake was made” and that when “some one has practised upon a soft-hearted New Englander in search of horrors [. . .] this is the result” (268).

Eastman also offers an explanation for the fact that slave owners' dogs are used for tearing apart disobedient slaves. As she herself is deadly afraid of dogs, her narrator argues that a wildly imaginative Northerner, having the same fear, comes upon a dog tied to a leash. As she further argues: "After a great deal of mental exercise, the brain jumps at a conclusion, 'What are these dogs kept here for?' The answer is obvious: 'To hunt niggers when they run away'" (271). It is not just a misunderstanding in her eyes, but solely the fabrication of the mind of a Northerner. This runs counter to the various sources, such as the anonymous author and the people interviewed by Olmsted referred to earlier in the chapter, who witnessed the use of dogs in slave "hunts" (98).

Conclusion

According to Eastman, slaves are only significant when they suppress their own identity in favor of living in service of their white masters, adhering to the hierarchy as described in Jordan-Lake's "theology of whiteness." Any black character, whether slave or freedperson, who diverges from this supposedly God-ordained servitude, is portrayed as letting down the white characters who so deeply depend on them. Yet at the same time, Eastman tries to create a kinship between white and enslaved black women in these strictly hierarchical settings, yet fails to ground this connection as the oppression that white women experienced is not quite as egregious as those of the enslaved African Americans, and because Eastman similarly portrays slavery as a force for good. Because of this she paradoxically portrays slavery as both duty, for which she even calls out God, and as a genuinely benevolent system where slaves are treated kindly by warm, loving masters.

Chapter 3: The Politics of Race and Memory in Page's Plantation Fiction

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina was the first state to secede from the United States, to be followed shortly afterwards by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas (McPherson 235). Together they formed the Confederate States of America (254). After the Confederacy attacked Fort Sumter the Civil War started, and Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina joined the other Southern states into the Confederacy (254, 282). The states seceded because they were convinced that the federal government was not prohibiting the North from interfering with the South's right to own slaves (283). Northern states largely ignored the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which was intended to force the North to return runaway slaves from their territories, because they had abolished slavery and did not want to be complicit in it in any way (86).

The Civil War (lasting from 1861 to 1865) caused over 660.000 casualties and left large parts of Southern states in severe disrepair (254). The Reconstruction period followed and was intended to enable the South to get fully reinstated into the United States, as well as help African Americans in becoming emancipated U.S. citizens (Foner xxvii). However, the Reconstruction era was not the success it was supposed to be in regards to the protection of African Americans' civil rights. As the federal government was preoccupied with restoring the Union after the losses caused by the Civil War, it ended up prioritizing the reinstatement of the South over the interests of the newly-freed African Americans (Du Bois 378). Despite the fact that the South had lost the war and its slaves, at the end of the Reconstruction period in 1877 it had succeeded in gaining enough political influence to be able to disenfranchise African Americans, which Southern states did by enacting the so-called Jim Crow laws – laws that enforced racial segregation – in the 1880s and 90s (Foner xxiii).

A consequence of the reconciliation process was that in the South the Civil War began to be referred to as the Lost Cause: the South had lost the War but had also fought diligently for its sincere convictions during the war. As David Blight argues in *Race and Reunion* (2001), the reconciliation between North and South was aided by their "shared grief at war's costs coupled with Northern respect for the *sincerity* of Southern devotion to their cause, even when that cause was judged repugnant" (215). The war, Blight asserts, was as a result "drained of evil, and to a great extent, of cause or political meaning" (215). This allowed a new collective memory to be created, which ignored the social and political struggles of the recently emancipated African Americans in favor of speeding up the reconciliation process by arguing that it provided respite for white people who were tired of the social tumult that the Reconstruction era had caused. This new memory is referred to as the myth of the Old South, a fictional version of the Southern planter society which was not beholden to the so-called "messy" race relations of the Reconstruction era, but was governed by the familiar natural order of white supremacy as advocated before the Civil War (211). To justify this myth of the Old South, the genre of plantation fiction was revived, which reproduced the sentimental and unrealistic portrayals of plantation life seen in anti-Tom novels. Plantation fiction, with its portrayal of slavery as benevolent, became successful throughout the United States, despite the previous success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its anti-slavery message, which had turned abolitionism mainstream (MacKethan 316).

Thomas Nelson Page was the most prominent of the post-Reconstruction authors of plantation fiction who took part in creating this new collective memory of the Old South. In his short story collection *In Ole Virginia* (1887), Page celebrates the strong bond between Virginia slaves and their masters in an attempt to extol the noble virtues of those masters and emphasize the Southern losses in order to unequivocally establish the plantation life of the Old South as superior to the post-Reconstruction society.

In this chapter I will analyze Page's representation of African American characters in relation to his views of Reconstruction-era race relations. I will argue that Page uses African American characters as narrators within his frame narratives so that they can act as witnesses to how detrimental he believes the Reconstruction was to African Americans and aristocratic planters alike. His African American characters are nostalgic for living in service of their white masters on the idyllic plantations of the Old South. Furthermore, I will argue that Page applies these and other characteristics of plantation fiction not necessarily to improve the reconciliation process between North and South, which was an underlying objective of plantation literature, but to prioritize the glorification of the idyllic Virginia plantation life and acquit it for its role critics in the North believed the state had played in the Civil War and the preceding slavery debate.

I will base my arguments on a close-reading of the short stories in Page's *In Ole Virginia* and will specifically focus on the role and representation of the African American characters. In my analysis I will show the influence of both nineteenth-century race theories and Blight's account of the creation of a collective memory during the post-Reconstruction era, both of which culminated in the construction of the myth of the Old South. I will further rely on Page's essays in the collection *The Old South: Essays Social and Political* (1892), and various scholarly sources from both historians specialized in the Reconstruction period – such as William Dunning, W. E. B. Du Bois and Eric Foner – as well as literary scholars specialized in plantation literature, such as Lucinda MacKethan, to augment my arguments.

The Civil War and Reconstruction

When the Southern states seceded, slavery was their main reason for doing so. Several states, including Page's home state of Virginia, explicitly cited it as the reason for seceding from the Union. The first resolution of the Virginia Convention of 1861 "asserted states'

rights per se; the second was for retention of slavery; the third opposed sectional parties; the fourth called for equal recognition of slavery in both territories and non-slave states" (Riggs 264). The Southern states insisted that the North attempted to abolish slavery throughout the U. S. and therefore they felt they were infringed upon their states' rights, which supposedly trumped any moral argument against human bondage (264). Many Southerners, including Page, would later state that the reason for secession had been that they had wished for slavery to be abolished gradually, rather than all at once as many abolitionists and radical Republicans had demanded (*The Old South* 38). However, it was unlikely that slavery would have been abolished voluntarily throughout the South. Planters thoroughly depended upon it economically and if it was to be eradicated they likely would have put up heavy resistance (Jordan-Lake xv). Furthermore, the Compromise of 1850 – which had also contained the reinforced Fugitive Slave Act – had taken so long to be ratified precisely because it allowed slavery to become legal in the new territories admitted into the Union (xv). There were very few signs that slavery was being abolished, however gradually, in the South.

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 was revolutionary in that regard. It made the abolition of slavery a war goal, so that Southern states could not become part of the Union again without eradicating slavery (Foner xxvii). While the end of the Civil War is usually seen as the beginning of the Reconstruction period, Foner views the signing of the Proclamation as the start of the period as he argues that the Proclamation was the first step toward the emancipation of African Americans (xxvii). After the South's surrender in 1865 the Freedmen's Bureau was set up in order to provide freedpeople with their most basic needs, as they often had very little in the way of basic provisions like food or clothing after their emancipation. (Du Bois 219). Even though the Bureau was meant to be shut down one year after the Civil War, as it was supposed to have completed its goals, it continued to be renewed several times in order to help freedpeople in acquiring land and to give them political

support in the South (221). After President Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's Vice President and successor after his assassination, vetoed the renewal of the Bureau's charter in 1868, the Bureau was effectively weakened beyond repair – an act for which President Johnson was ultimately impeached (Foner 190, 247). Despite, and also because of, the obstructions of the President, Congress added three Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution between 1865 and 1870, in order to constitutionally guarantee the civil and voting rights of African Americans. The Thirteenth, adopted shortly after the end of the Civil War, fully ended involuntary servitude (Du Bois 207). The Fourteenth, proposed in 1866 and finally ratified in 1868, was specifically designed to address the freedpeople's civil rights and equal protection under the law (288). The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, prohibited the federal and/or state governments from interfering with a citizen's right to vote regardless of race, color or previous condition of servitude (378).

Fear and distrust of emancipated African Americans led angry Southerners to retaliate. Du Bois writes that reactionaries began "a civil war of secret assassination and open intimidation and murder" (474). One of these secret organizations was the Ku Klux Klan, which started its first wave of race-based terrorism between 1865 and 1871, at the height of the Reconstruction period (474). The KKK was especially determined to prevent black citizens from having a larger role within Southern society and its politics, and its members lynched thousands of African Americans to intimidate local black communities (Foner 426). Voter suppression was also a goal; intimidation by the KKK and other secret racist organizations prevented many African American citizens from voting for their candidates (343).

Despite these intimidation efforts, African Americans became actively involved in politics to enact change for themselves (xxiii). African Americans in the South were determined to succeed as citizens, and tried to establish their own communities with the

foundation of churches and public schools (Du Bois 637). In his classic 1935 study *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, W. E. B. Du Bois (a sociologist rather than a historian) argues that their spirit of enterprise had been awakened during the Civil War, as African Americans had taken the opportunity to walk away from their owners as soon as the War started (66). Du Bois concedes that "the responsibility of Negroes for the government [. . .] was necessarily limited" as "most of the administrative power was in the hands of the whites" (411). In the same book Du Bois also calls out those historians, especially William A. Dunning and his mentor John W. Burgess, who in the early twentieth century argued that African Americans were not capable of successfully engaging in politics as they were "barbarians" (Burgess viii). Burgess argued that "a black skin means membership in a race which has never [. . .] created any civilization of any kind," and to let black people perform in a position of any sort of politics would be "to establish barbarism in power" (viii). Du Bois argues that this was the real "frontal attack on Reconstruction" as opposed to what Burgess argued (717). William A. Dunning also defended this position. As Eric Foner sums up Dunning's views:

> [Dunning] was convinced that the white South genuinely accepted the reality of military defeat. Then followed the sordid period of Congressional or Radical Reconstruction (1867–77), an era of corruption presided over by unscrupulous "carpetbaggers" [Northerners who had moved South] from the North, unprincipled Southern white "scalawags," [Southern supporters of Reconstruction] and ignorant freedmen. After much needless suffering, the South's white community banded together to overthrow these governments and restore "home rule" (a euphemism for white supremacy). (xvii)

Though Dunning's theory that the South was a victim of Northern aggression was very influential, resulting in the so-called Dunning school of slavery historians, it was heavily

criticized by Du Bois, as well as by Foner and other modern historians. Dunning's "home rule" was precisely what many Southerners used as justification for the continued oppression of African Americans. As African Americans were fighting for civil rights, and the federal government was helping them with those efforts, Southerners distanced themselves from these efforts by saying that they were becoming victims of said political and social change, as they believed themselves to be overrun by "barbaric" African Americans and corrupt Northerners. While Dunning's theories on race have since become outdated, they are nevertheless still relevant.[1] They show the social anxiety in the South about the political power black people got during the Reconstruction, as well as the enormous influence of Page's – and other Southern authors' – strategy of blaming outside influences for the South's problems.

Plantation Fiction, its Authors, and the Myth of the Old South

The genre of plantation fiction received a new impetus in the 1880s, after the Reconstruction period. In an effort to undo the social and political changes of the Reconstruction era, Southern writers increasingly began to write of their old "traditions" and their simplified description of plantation life out of an "urge to criticize a contemporary social situation according to an earlier and purer set of standards" (MacKethan 4). In keeping with the fiction that the plantation setting had been peaceful and tranquil, plantation literature was inspired by anti-Tom fiction written before the War, as those novels featured similarly pastoral plantation settings and race relations (10). Anti-Tom novels, then, became the basis of the myth of the Old South.

[1] Adam Fairclough, in his 2012 article "Was the Grant of Black Suffrage a Political Error?," argues that the Dunning school has been unfairly treated, suggesting that modern historians disproportionately criticize it for its view that emancipated African Americans were ignorant regarding Reconstruction-era politics, which ultimately hurt their influence (159). Yet, Fairclough, like Dunning, seems to underestimate the enormity of the struggle that emancipated African Americans experienced, as freedpeople were subject to violence "long before a single black man cast a ballot or held a public office" (Ross and Rowland). As I am primarily concerned with the longevity of Page's white supremacist views – by which the Dunning school is undoubtedly influenced – I will leave aside this argument.

While the Northern response to anti-Tom novels had been largely negative, Northern readers were in fact interested in the plantation fiction of the later nineteenth century as they had gotten tired of the ideals of the Reconstruction (13). David Blight argues that in their need for reconciliation, North and South formed a new collective memory of the Civil War where both sides shared grief over their collective losses (215). As Blight argues, “race was so deeply at the root of the war’s causes and consequences, and so powerful a source of division in American social psychology that it served as the antithesis of a culture of reconciliation” (4). The need for reconciliation took precedence over that for emancipation, if only to make life simpler and more orderly again, and so “the inexorable drive for reunion both used and trumped race” (2). As a result white authors of plantation fiction reiterated the notion that African Americans were best suited to a life in servitude of white masters, the opposite of what abolitionists like Stowe had asserted. As Paul Buck points out, “[Stowe’s] Uncle Tom was the martyr of a system, but [Page’s] Uncle Billy [. . .] was as he himself stated the 'chief 'pendence uv Meh Lady'” (210). In the role of submissive slave the African American appeared essential to the plantation setting in these stories, which placed the orderly race relations of the plantation opposite the uncertainty that emancipation had brought with it for whites during Reconstruction. As in anti-Tom novels, an effort was made by authors of plantation fiction to make the idyllic plantation setting also contrast sharply with the busy urban sprawl of Northern cities, which helped Northern readers forget their social anxieties about race relations as well (Dowty 27). Many Northern magazines began to cater to “the new national curiosity concerning different sectional habits and traditions” and regional fiction became very popular (MacKethan 12). In response, many Southern authors of plantation fiction tried to advance political reconciliation between the two parties on a metaphorical level by having two opposing characters unite in marriage. Plantation fiction often featured

weddings between a Southern and a Northern partner in an attempt to reconcile the two factions who had been at war (10).

Many Northerners assumed that Southerners knew more about African Americans than they because of their intimate relationship with slaves and therefore accepted the view of (former) slaves as propagated by authors of plantation fiction (MacKethan 13). Southern authors availed themselves of the opportunity to rewrite the narrative of slavery (13). Freedpeople were represented as the "sacred remembrancers of the grace and harmony of the Old South," as in plantation novels they nostalgically longed for a fictive Old South (Blight 222). The "Negro" ultimately became the "most picturesque and popular figure brought forward by Southern local colorists" (13). As Albion Tourgée, a severe contemporary critic of the myth of the Old South that was propagated by the plantation romance points out, literature "had become not only Southern in type but distinctly Confederate in sympathy" and was yet another blow against the emancipation of African Americans as it promoted reconciliation of white Southerners and Northerners (405).

Thomas Nelson Page was not merely content with portraying the Old South as an idyllic setting but used plantation fiction to absolve his home state of Virginia from any wrongdoing during the Civil War period. Born in 1853, Page was the son of a slave-owning planter and was taught "by conservative parents to respect the old and suspect the new" (MacKethan 314). As he was still a child during the Civil War, he experienced slavery primarily as a childhood memory, which further explains his nostalgic view of the system. Furthermore, as he held the war responsible for his family's financial troubles and only his family's lineage remained during Reconstruction, Page became defensive of what he called the "Old" South when names had still mattered and, he claimed, not everything revolved around money as it did in the post-war present: he "came to see his ancestors [. . .] as heroic

embodiments of a golden age" (316). Page advocates this belief in his essay "Social Life in Old Virginia before the War":

> Every one had food, every one had raiment, every one had peace. There was not wealth in the base sense in which we know it and strive for it and trample down others for it now. But there was wealth in a good sense in which the litany of our fathers used it. There was weal. (184)

Page uses "weal" not only to denote what he considers the good kind of wealth – the one that provides food for everyone – but also the general happiness of a community, both of which he believes the South lost as result of the Civil War and the Reconstruction that followed.

As part of establishing the myth of the Old South, authors of plantation fiction like Page increasingly placed Southern culture – and especially slavery – within a framework of conservatism by reiterating historical precedence. Before the Civil War, slavery advocates had argued that as slavery had always existed, Southern planters were justified in keeping the system in place (Hagood 85). After the war, the same consistency and conservatism were viewed as the positive counterparts to the social changes that emancipation had brought, which is why they became a staple of plantation fiction. The focus on conservatism also allowed Southern writers to depict plantation owners as aristocratic, for example by claiming a noble British ancestry, which was in fact also based on fiction. In his essay "The Old South" Page argues that the Southern colonies "were rooted in the faith of the England from which they came" in manners "political, religious, and civil" (7). In contrast, he argues that the "independence of the Northern refugees" is a far cry from the "noble and worthy advancers" that he believes the Virginia planters are (7). By claiming that the Southern way of life had always been inspired by aristocracy and continuity, Page and his fellow Southern writers could broaden this schism between a South that would always want to remain peaceful, and

the North that was responsible for the social changes that had unsettled the region during Reconstruction.

The Myth of Black Nostalgia for Slavery

Page's attempted rehabilitation of the aristocratic South is closely connected to his white supremacist view of African Americans. In his essays Page asserts that slavery was a blessing to them as it "gave [the] race the only civilization it has had since the dawn of history" as they are part of an "ignorant and hostile race" that needs the help of benevolent whites to lead fulfilled and happy lives (32, 283). Page frequently employs the genre of the frame narrative in his stories to justify this ideology. His frame narrative is consistently set during Reconstruction, where a white person meets a freedperson who is only all too willing to tell his recollections of his kind masters and the War. By relying on his African American characters as narrators of their own stories within the frame narrative, Page can treat them as witnesses to the positive characteristics of slavery. For example, Sam explicitly makes the argument in "Marse Chan" that African Americans were much better off during slavery:

> Niggers didn' hed nothin' 't all to do jes' hed to 'ten' to de feedin' an' cleanin' de hosses, an' doin' what de marster tell 'em to do ; an' when dey wuz sick, dey had things sont 'em out de house, an' de same doctor come to see 'em whar 'ten' to de white folks when dey wuz po'ly. Dyar warn' no trouble nor nothin'. (10)

By having Sam argue that there had been "no trouble nor nothin'" before the war, Page can repudiate the emancipation effort through a black witness, giving his benevolent view of slavery more credibility (10).

Sam spends the rest of the story fondly reminiscing about his late former master Channing, with whom he had grown up and cared for. "Marse Chan," as he calls his master, even takes Sam with him as a valet in the Civil War because "yo' know he warn' gwine an' lef

Sam" (4). Sam, however, went along as his master's personal assistant, since the South did not enlist black soldiers in the Civil War as Confederates "feared to trust them far, and hated the idea of depending for victory and defense on these very persons for whose slavery they were fighting" (Du Bois 116). In this way Page hijacks the existing plight of African Americans by constructing a narrative which values the accounts of fictional slaves over the historical accounts of actual former slaves like Frederick Douglass, who argued that letting newly-emancipated freedpeople fight for the Union would allow them to earn the right to become true citizens of the United States (qtd. in Du Bois 102).

Despite being in servitude, Page's freed characters argue that being a slave was a good thing as they were closer to white people than during the Reconstruction where they appear, sometimes literally, abandoned without white supervision. In the story "Unc' Edinburg's Drowndin'" the freed character Uncle Edinburg mourns for the loss of respect for white gentlemen, as elections now have "ev'y sort o' worms squirmin' up 'ginst one nurr," which is so diametrically opposed to the "gent'mens 'lection" of the old days (58). Page laments through his African American characters that they – and also white men who are not considered to be gentlemen – are now allowed to vote, an example of how disastrous he believes the Reconstruction to be.

Page's enslaved characters seem to exist solely to defend their masters as they always speak fondly of them. Uncle Edinburg says that he "'ain' nuver see nobody yit wuz good to [him] as Marse George" (141). He even attacks Nancy, the servant of Miss Charlotte, for not being respectful to his master because he "wuz teckin up for de fambly" (47). Similarly, Uncle Billy tells in "Meh Lady" of how his "family," consisting of his white mistresses "Mistis" and her daughter "Meh Lady," experienced the Civil War. Uncle Billy vividly describes how Yankee soldiers invaded their private home; when a soldier wants to go into the room where his Master lies dead, Mistis tries to prevent that. Uncle Billy says, "I know ef

he had lay his han' on Mistis I was gwine split him wide open," showing his devotion to his master's family (91). Page, to uphold the honor of the Old South, adopts the strong family ties that Eastman and other slavery advocates wrote of. So, as in Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin*, loyalty to the white family is rewarded. Good slaves, after all, received food, proper lodging, and families who provided for them. Furthermore, Page reiterates Eastman's argument that by being in such close proximity to the "noble" white Virginian, the slaves can almost become noble themselves – almost, as they could obviously not be as noble as the white plantation owners.

Page acknowledges this divide between black and white by broadening it through his use and transcription of dialect. African American characters especially were increasingly characterized through their thick dialects, which in comparison with their white masters made them appear less intelligent. He opens *In Ole Virginia* by giving an explanatory note on the particular Eastern-Virginia dialect used by the African American characters in his stories. He legitimizes his use of dialect by elaborating on the accuracy with which he has transcribed it, saying that "the elision is so constant that it is impossible to produce the exact sound, and in some cases it has been found necessary to subordinate the phonetic arrangement to intelligibility" (i). Enslaved characters speak in a dialect in which syllables are often heavily elided and where "the final consonant is rarely sounded. Adverbs, prepositions, and short words are frequently slighted, as is the possessive. The letter r is not usually rolled except when used as a substitute for M, but is pronounced ah" (i). That is why characters like Sam in "Marse Chan" speak like this: "an' all de folks wuz mighty glad, too, 'cause dey all loved ole marster" and refer to Master Channing and Colonel Chamberlain as "Marse Chan" and "Cun'l Chahmb'lin" respectively (4, 7).

By giving this explanation Page presents himself as an authority on this particular dialect, regardless of whether his transcriptions are accurate. This claim of authority enables

Page to use a stronger dialect for his African American characters and legitimizing the divide between them and their white masters who speak Standard English (Bundrick 125). The use of dialect enables Page to portray African Americans as the familiar racialist stereotypes we recognize from the anti-Tom novels of the 1850s (125). Authors of plantation fiction like Page succeeded in legitimizing this stereotype as well, as plantation fiction was so popular with Northern readers precisely because it was so adept at portraying these distinct and to them unfamiliar regional settings, which was depicted partially through the use of dialects (MacKethan 37). Of course this racialist use of dialect disregards the fact that many people in the lower classes – and presumably some in the higher classes as well – regardless of race would have spoken the same, or a very similar, regional dialect.

The use of dialect as an index of race is similar to the methods of Stowe and Eastman who, either deliberately or accidentally, keep the divide between black and white intact by depicting (at least some of) their enslaved characters as ignorant speakers. Neither Stowe nor Eastman attempts to transcribe dialects accurately, making their black characters appear slightly less ignorant than Page's black characters. Their enslaved characters nevertheless also speak in a manner that betrays their limited education. While Eastman uses similar ignorant speech to make her African American characters appear less intelligent, she only applies this dialect in some instances. Aunt Phillis speaks Standard English, no doubt because Eastman portrays her as an enslaved character who attempts to emulate her white masters as closely as possible because that is the only way enslaved people can live a noble life. On the other hand there are characters like Sarah, a runaway slave from Mr. Weston's plantation, and Bacchus, the ignorant house slave and Phillis's husband, who do speak in a stereotypically ignorant manner. They use mangled verbs like "cotched," "washin," and "ironin," which, while perhaps not representative of any existing dialect, still evoke the ignorance of Eastman's enslaved characters (Eastman 225). Stowe tries to subvert this stereotype and indeed turns

many of her African American characters into noble human beings, yet characters like Topsy speak in an ignorant manner: “I spects, if they 's to pull every spire o' har out o' my head, it wouldn't do no good, neither, -- I 's so wicked! Laws!” (Stowe 408). Stowe uses dialects much more than Eastman as she does not need to make them appear more educated than they are.

Criticizing the Civil War and Reconstruction

What appears to be a subversion of plantation fiction is that Page does not seem too interested in reconciliation with the North. Instead of focusing on healing and redemption, Page’s primary focus lies with insisting that Virginia was blameless of any wrongdoing during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Because of this, Page presents the Virginian planter as someone who is unwillingly made part of the war by abolitionists and the Democratic Party. For example, in “Marse Chan” Sam’s two masters are Whigs, or in other words, Virginian aristocrats, and are as such opposed to the War and secession. However, the opponent of “Marse Chan,” Colonel Chamberlain, “wuz a Dimicrat. He wuz in favor of de war” (16). Chamberlain challenges “Marse Chan,” as Sam calls his Master Channing, to a duel. This denotes Chamberlain’s aggression. The duel ends in a fight where Chamberlain calls “Marse Chan” an abolitionist, which, given Sam’s vehement reaction, illustrates the kind of insult this was in the Old South. Despite his claim that he has “never wittingly written a line which he did not hope might tend to bring about a better understanding between the North and South, and finally lead to a more perfect Union,” Page does not accept any blame for the war, and argues that others – including Northerners – were responsible instead (qtd. in Buck 215). Page continually argues that proper Virginians are mild-tempered people, which accounts for them not starting the war, or Virginia not being the first state to secede.

Page’s focus on the rehabilitation of Virginia is also why he disregards the reunification trope that is so essential to most plantation fiction. Rather than featuring a

wedding between a Northerner and a Southerner as a symbol of reunion, Page treats his wedding story – between two Virginians – as a form of regional reconciliation intended as proof of Virginia's superiority. In "Meh Lady: A Story of the War" house slave Uncle Billy tells of how "Meh Lady" falls in love with Captain Wilton from the Union Army. Wilton is different from his fellow Union soldiers, as he is "half Virginian" himself (93). Upholding the image of the North as enemy, "Mistis," the mother of "Meh Lady," responds by saying that he cannot be Virginian as "Virginians never invade Virginia" and they "claim no kinsmen among Virginia's enemies" (93). Wilton falls in love with "Meh Lady" and wants to marry her. While Wilton is deemed at first to be an unsuitable partner due to being a Union Captain, his being half-Virginian gives him the opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of the planter family. According to Uncle Billy, Wilton "done got so likely an' agreeable lookin'" that he is accepted into the family, and he and "Meh Lady" eventually marry after their initial conflicts are resolved (129). Because Wilton is half-Virginian it means that Page twists the trope of marriage as symbol of reconciliation between North and South so that it becomes a regional reunion instead. As Page believes the North is responsible for Reconstruction, he is not interested in national reconciliation. Rather, he exalts the glory of the Old South so much that even those Virginians who fought in the Union army cannot help but fall in love with it.

Although Page's stories helped establish the mythical Old South plantation, the stories "Ole 'Stracted" and "No Haid Pawn" seem to undermine the idyllic picture by showing the horrific consequences of slavery. "Ole 'Stracted" tells the story of Ephraim and his family who are forced to abandon the plot of land they rent if they cannot pay their landowner the eight hundred dollars that he wants from them, an amount that was "more than they could make at the present rate in a lifetime" (145). "Ole 'Stracted" is the nickname of a former slave who also lives on this landowner's property, and who has become so mentally degraded that he "could not tell the name of his master or wife, or even his own name" (153). After the war

he resorts to waiting for his master who used to own the plantation on which Ephraim and his family are now renting land:

> He always declared that he had been sold by some one other than his master from that plantation, that his wife and boy had been sold to some other person at the same time and that his master was coming in the summer to buy him back and take him home, and would bring him his wife and child when he came. (153)

That his wife and children were sold from his former master is an acknowledgement that incidents like that did occur, which contrasts sharply with Page's insistence elsewhere in the book that slavery was beneficial for the slaves themselves. However, they were sold by "someone other than his master" and his master promised "Ole 'Stracted" to bring back his family, according to the old slave (153). The benevolent nature of Virginia masters is seemingly kept intact as it is not made clear what exactly happened to his master, though it is assumed that he died.

Furthermore, while their current landowner asks an outrageous sum of money, he "don' know nuttin 'bout black folks, ain' nuver been fotch up wid 'em" and is referred to by Ephraim's wife – who remains unnamed – as "nuttin but po' white trash!" (145, 147). True Virginian planters would have had experience with employing slaves so this person cannot have been one, given his poor treatment of the African Americans living on his land. Page tries to distance himself from greedy landowners, even those in Virginia, by saying that they are only in it for the money and are not as noble as those who did care deeply about black folks before the Civil War. Page implicitly acknowledges that slavery led to abuse, yet misses the mark by insisting that this was enacted by those not familiar enough with slaves or the aristocratic ways of the Virginia plantation. Page consistently argues that these distortions of the idyllic plantation are due to the influence of people outside the Virginia planter class, reinforcing his belief that only outsiders can corrupt the plantation setting.

The passage where “Ole ‘Stracted” passes away is paradoxically influenced by the melodrama of Stowe’s novel. He dies while he sees, in a vision, that “his Master had at last come for him” which means that “Ole 'Stracted had indeed gone home” (161). Whereas Uncle Tom dies as a martyr “Ole ‘Stracted” dies while believing he is reunited with his master, which Page considers a happier ending than the emancipation that the freedperson received during Reconstruction.

The other story, “No Haid Pawn,” gives an even more harrowing account of the abuse of slaves. “No Haid Pawn” is a gothic story about a haunted plantation mansion. The narrator, an unnamed white person, tells that the mansion is haunted by the spirits of its owner and the slave he decapitated. The haunted plantation mansion as the setting for a gothic tale contrasts sharply with Page’s other stories, which romanticize the plantation South. Page, however, does not use this story about a haunted house as a metaphor for the abuse slaves experienced as result of the treatment of white Virginia slave-owners, but to show how the idyllic plantation setting was corrupted by others. It is revealed that the mansion was built by “a stranger in this section” who had “no ties either of blood or friendship [. . .] with their neighbors, who were certainly open-hearted and open-doored enough to overcome anything but the most persistent unneighborliness” (166). Page argues that the stranger’s alienation was the reason why his neighbors were distant to him, once again removing any responsibility on the part of Virginia planters.

Furthermore, the later occupant of the mansion is a “West Indian” who “destroyed his own property while he was perpetrating a crime of appalling and unparalleled horror”: he beheaded a slave (169). Particularly relevant is how unceremonious the death of this slave is. Unlike Uncle Tom, Aunt Phillis, or even “Ole ‘Stracted,” the slave remains unnamed, and serves only as a device to illustrate how horrible the “West Indian” slave-owner is. The death of the slave is even turned into a somewhat morbid joke, as the plantation’s original name,

"No Raid Pawn," becomes "No Haid Pawn," a pun on decapitation that feels out of place in relation to the story's horrific elements. After the "West Indian" is executed for his crime, he and his victim haunt the plantation forever, corrupting its pastoral qualities. Page's white narrator describes the entire incident as an "act whose fiendishness surpassed belief," making it clear how horrified he is about the events (169). The narrator does not deny the horrors of slavery but seems to argue that they occurred only on those plantations not governed by white Southerners, once again removing any responsibility for the widespread abuse of slaves.

Despite these explanations, these two stories are more realistic depictions of plantation life than Page's other stories, where the plantation remains an idyllic location. Even within the context of the stories themselves the abuse is treated as rare occurrences. Nevertheless, they are still more realistic depictions than what Eastman subscribes to, even though both she and Page argue that slavery was benevolent. However, as Eastman cannot admit that these horrors took place, she resorts to making up elaborate excuses for witnesses seeing slaves being burned alive and being ripped apart by dogs in her "Concluding Remarks." As Stowe aims to portray enslaved characters as noble and their plight as uplifting, she does depict horrific abuse but portrays it, for example Uncle Tom's death, as the sacrifice of martyrs. Page portrays in these stories the hopelessness of slavery relatively accurately. Where he falters is in the explanations that essentially acquit white Virginian plantation owners from any wrongdoing.

Conclusion

The reading audience's increased interest for nostalgic plantation fiction and its myth of the Old South illustrates how, towards the end of the Reconstruction, Northern support for the African Americans' emancipation slowly declined. After Reconstruction ended, both North and South seemed to prefer reconciliation over protecting the civil and political rights

of African Americans. Because of this the post-Reconstruction period was filled with racial intimidation from racist Southerners. As a result, many authors of plantation fiction, including Page, established a myth of the Old South to cover up the reality of racial violence, intimidation and discrimination, and used African American characters to give support to their beliefs that the white hegemony of this Old South plantation was superior to the Reconstruction Era. Page goes even further by trying to portray Virginia as innocent victim in the Civil War and not complicit in the horrors of slavery so he can criticize outside influences on trying to corrupt the South during Reconstruction, which indicates that Page is less concerned with reconciliation, or at least is not willing to compromise his beliefs for it.

Conclusion

The authors of the three works of fiction about slavery and plantation life that are discussed in this thesis strategically depict race relations in a way that furthers their agendas. As a result, the authors of these works, published in the antebellum and post-Reconstruction periods, deliberately take control over the narratives of black people in these same periods, who were further subjugated as a result.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, while obviously advocating the abolition of slavery, nevertheless portrays many of her enslaved characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in racialist terms as distinctly different from white people. She does this primarily in order to connect with her white readers, as the novel's moderate take on abolitionism was deemed to be more attractive than the horrors of abuse that other, more militant abolitionists inveighed against at the time. By portraying African Americans as kind and non-threatening to white people, Stowe presents a more positive picture of them than other white authors, yet she still depicts a sanitized and romanticized version of reality. By adhering to romantic racialism, which was different from the widespread form of racism, that depicted black people as essentially ignorant brutes, Stowe effectively replaces one racialist belief with another. She portrays her African American characters as benevolent and innately pious to make them sympathetic to her white readership. Because of this, Uncle Tom dies a martyr so as to show the readers the horrors of slavery, and to spread his faith to the disbelievers in the novel itself. Rather than having her African American characters stay in America and become part of an integrated society, Stowe makes them return to Africa to build a life among what supposedly are their own kind to become truly happy, regardless of the fact that this kept the divide between black and white intact.

Mary Henderson Eastman, in response to the success of Stowe's book, copies the sentimental characteristics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in order to argue that slavery is a benign

institution and that the white male hegemony is superior, despite her belief that slavery is also a "curse" on white people, instigated by God. In *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* Eastman nevertheless praises the virtues of the slavery system by saying that because slaves are inherently ignorant and childlike, they work best under the supervision of white masters. She subscribes to the "theology of whiteness" where the white male plantation owner is essentially a godlike figure who is responsible for his family, which includes his wife, children, and slaves. As the plantation setting had been used by Stowe as a backdrop for the abuses of slavery, authors of anti-Tom novels – including Eastman – had to use the same setting to acquit the South from these accusations, and did so by turning the plantation into an idyllic setting, where planters and slaves lived together and were considered to be an extended family, in order to prove how beneficial slavery was for all involved. As Eastman believes black people are best suited to serving white people, she applies the same principle to her novel as her black characters in the story exist merely in the periphery to confirm the virtues of slavery and the benevolence of their white masters. Faithful slaves like Phillis enter into the picture to say how well they have been treated, while slaves being tricked by abolitionists to run away, or even freedpeople, serve as cautionary examples to show what happens when slaves do not remain with their "family." The bulk of the novel, however, is primarily concerned with the sentimental plights of white characters, and especially that of Alice Weston, the daughter of the plantation owner. Inspired by the romance tradition Alice has to choose the most suitable marriage partner, and because Eastman is so concerned with the importance of performing one's duty, Alice must do the same. Eastman tries to depict white plantation women as victims of the patriarchy by suggesting they too are subjugated, but as she simultaneously believes that the white male hegemony and that slaves being in servitude within that hegemony are both good things, she cannot or does not criticize the oppression of women too explicitly.

This notion of victimization is featured even more prominently in Thomas Nelson Page's short story collection *In Ole Virginia*. Disappointed with the outcome of the Civil War and disillusioned with the ramifications of the Reconstruction period, he avails himself of the opportunity – as did his fellow white authors of plantation fiction – to depict the South, and especially Virginia, as victims by portraying freedpeople as helpless people who depend on them, and blaming Northerners and the federal government for having corrupted the sacred Southern plantation. In order to counter social change and keep African Americans in a subordinate position, Page and other authors of plantation fiction created a myth of the Old South, which illustrated an alternative historical South, featuring plantations that were more majestic than they had been in reality and race relations that were once again orderly, as black people were again relegated to their role of submissive slave. In line with the reframing of the black narrative, it must be said that only white authors of plantation were responsible for this. African American author Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932) took plantation fiction and deconstructed it in his Conjure Tales, telling of the inhumane horrors of slavery in a much less romanticized way than white authors had done, yet keeping the parables and frame stories commonly associated with plantation fiction intact by basing them on African American folk tales.

It is notable that in the post-Reconstruction period this Old South myth had become popular with Northern readers as well, as they had had become tired of the need to protect black rights and were more interested in national reconciliation. This legitimized Southern writers to extol the virtues of the plantation and its benevolent cast of characters, including submissive and caring slaves, within the familiar power structure of the patriarchy, and indeed present it as their collective memory of the antebellum era. Page defends slavery by using African Americans as narrators to bear witness to its benevolence. He uses them as witnesses while degrading them further as he lets them wax nostalgic about their time as faithful slaves

who love the white masters who subjugated them. He furthermore makes liberal use of stereotypical characteristics like dialect to suggest their ignorance and their simple-minded submission to their white masters. That authors like Page were actually influential in presenting the slavery system as benevolent ultimately proves the enormous battle African Americans had to fight for their constitutional civil rights, and first-class citizenship, as white people, North and South, opposed social change and opted for fantasy over reality.

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