UC Santa Barbara
Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title
"I Go to Liberia": Following Uncle Tom's Cabin to Africa, excerpt (2018)

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6pn9d92v

Journal
Journal of Transnational American Studies, 11(2)

Author
Dinius, Marcy J.

Publication Date
2020

DOI
10.5070/T8112051019

Copyright Information
Copyright 2020 by the author(s).This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Excerpted from Tracy C. Davis and Stefka Mihaylova, eds.,
Uncle Tom's Cabins: A Transnational History of America's Most Mutable Book
(Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018). Copyright 2018 by
Tracy C. Davis and Stefka Mihaylova.
Reprinted with permission from University of Michigan Press.

Marcy J. Dinius

"I Go to *Liberia*": Following *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Africa

Since the incorporation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into the American literary canon in the 1980s, scholars have revisited the novel to critique how its conclusion deports its major black characters to Liberia, arguing that this move ultimately compromises the novel's good antislavery cultural work and lays bare the imperial logic undergirding Stowe's politics of domesticity.[1] Despite such expansions of our critical view to consider the novel's implications beyond the borders of the United States, literary historians have yet to follow *Uncle Tom's Cabin* itself to Africa to examine the significant role that its fictional black characters' advocacy of a nation of their own has played in Liberian colonization, nationalism, and citizenship, in both theory and practice. Granted, such "Results"—as Stowe titles the chapter that resolves the stories of the Harris family, Cassy, and Mme de Thoux by sending them all to Africa—are difficult to track, due to Liberia's limited print culture during its early national period and to the damage done to its libraries, archives, and colleges by challenging environmental conditions, fire, and civil war in the subsequent centuries.[2] But the more easily recoverable writings and experiences of actual black emigrants to Liberia also have received limited scholarly attention, even as work in African American print culture and history has flourished. The anti-colonization position of influential nineteenth-century African Americans, including David Walker and Frederick Douglass, has carried the day.[3]

In necessarily taking a wider view of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in relation to Liberia, this essay begins to recover two underrepresented positions on Stowe's novel in relation to the controversial issue of African coloniza-

tion: that held by pro-colonization African Americans and that of actual emigrants to Liberia. The archive for the latter is not only scant but also decidedly biased in favor of the colonization mission, given the American Colonization Society's and its state-level affiliates' investment in print for advancing their mission and publicizing its results, as well as the preservation of its archives by U.S. institutions.[4] But these structural limitations and our own political problems with the racist and/or imperialist motives driving the African colonization movement should not cause us to ignore either the important roles that nineteenth-century colonizationists and emigrants to Liberia played in both shaping and responding to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in North America, Europe, and Africa or the significant role that the novel played in shaping ideas about Liberia and its settler and native populations.[5] Taking this multidimensional view extricates us from the critical and pedagogical rut of including pro forma condemnations of Stowe's conclusion in our analyses of the novel and gives us a broader, more representative understanding of its deployment by a range of black readers in relation to the complicated issues of self-representation, self-determination, race, and nation.

In what follows, I consider how Stowe modeled her character George Harris's views after those of real-life participants in the colonization debate and project. I then turn to examine how this fictional character's views subsequently were received by U.S.-based colonizationists and actual emigrants to Liberia who assumed positions of power in the new nation; both groups were equally eager to offer up Harris as compelling proof that the young republic was an established black nation ready and eager for recognition by the world. Following *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Liberia allows us to track Stowe's conversion of fact into fiction that was then deployed by pro-colonizationists and Liberians as fact. Tracing this circuit of fact and fiction also recovers how closely connected the Liberian response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was to how the world responded to the new nation of Liberia.

LIBERIAN COLONIZATION: "SUBSERV[ING] ALL SORTS OF PURPOSES"

Before following *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Liberia, it is well worth reconsidering how Stowe's emancipated characters likely ended up there. In one of the most influential examinations of the pro-colonization conclusion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Michelle Burnham challenges the novel's twentieth-century

elevation "to the status of *the* American abolitionist novel," by reminding us that colonization was unpopular with leading black and white abolitionists of the 1850s. She argues that the narrative's dispatching of Cassy, the Harrises, Mme de Thoux, and Topsy to Africa following their emancipation "compromises what would otherwise be its committed abolitionist message." For Burnham, the conclusion lays bare the novel's "problem of incorporating the bodies of Blacks into the national body once liberation is effected."[6] Reading through the lens of abolitionism alone, however, excludes more binocular perspectives that were also available at the time, embodied by the renowned African American daguerreotypist Augustus Washington, a pro-colonization abolitionist and an American emigrant to Liberia. As she was composing George Harris's pro-colonization letter for chapter 43 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe almost surely drew on an essay that Washington wrote in 1851.[7] On 9 July, the *New York Tribune* published Washington's essay "African Colonization," likely as Stowe was writing chapter 11 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which George Harris first disidentifies as an American and articulates his desire for a country of his own.[8] While Stowe was most directly influenced by her father, Lyman Beecher, who publicly advocated colonization, similarities between Washington's essay and Harris's letter strongly suggest that she found in Washington not just a black advocate of the project but also a model for reconciling the opposition of abolition and colonization.

Washington dedicates a good deal of his lengthy essay to considering colonization in relation to abolition, lamenting how supporters of each cause have become antagonists instead of allies. "Both of these benevolent societies," he notes, "might perhaps have accomplished more good if they had wasted less ammunition in firing at each other."[9] By "taking a liberal and more comprehensive view of the whole matter," Washington is able to conclude that "whatever may have been the faults, inconsistencies and seeming opposition" of colonization and abolition, "both have been instrumental in doing so much good in their own way," as well as that "an all-wise Providence" will resolve these differences "toward a grander and more sublime result than either association at present contemplates."[10]

In his letter, George Harris similarly acknowledges that "Liberia may have subserved all sorts of purposes" but that the "God above all man's schemes" has "overruled" opposing forces and "founded for us a nation" via the American Colonization Society (441). This parallel suggests that if Stowe was reluctant to incorporate liberated black bodies into the national

body, as Burnham has argued, she shared this reluctance with Augustus Washington, whose point of view she incorporated into her novel. In siding with abolitionists and neglecting the pro-colonization position, scholars have associated George Harris primarily with Frederick Douglass and other prominent educated blacks on whom Stowe also drew to develop the character. By doing so, we have missed not just his connection to Washington but also, significantly, more complicated understandings that were possible at the time, about abolition and colonization, fact and fiction, and the United States and Liberia.[11]

Certainly, such an understanding of the abolition and colonization movements was uncommon in the 1850s, when polarization dominated. Recognizing this, Washington dedicates his essay to carving out a more moderate position.

> For our own part, under the existing state of things, we cannot see why any hostility should exist between those who are true Abolitionists and that class of Colonizationists who are such from just and benevolent motives. Nor can we see a reason why a man of pure and enlarged philanthropy may not be in favor of both, unless his devotion to one should cause him to neglect the other. Extremes in any case are always wrong.[12]

Washington reasons that colonization promises to resolve racial antagonism rather than perpetuating it through a separate-but-equal compromise that allows two races and republics to flourish apart yet in parallel. Citing the exclusion of blacks in the United States from full and equal participation in citizenship, education, and employment, he concludes that it is "impossible [. . .] while in this country to prove to the world the moral and intellectual equality of the Africans and their descendants," and he sees little hope for ameliorating such structurally enforced inequality in the United States. As a result, he is "driven to the conclusion that the friendly and mutual separation of the two races" is "necessary to the peace, happiness and prosperity of both" and to "promote the interests of two great continents, and build up another powerful Republic."[13]

Washington acknowledges that neither this grand vision nor the reconciliation of abolition and colonization are likely to attract many supporters, given the resolutely anti-colonization stance of the "leaders of the colored people in this country." He describes himself as a "mere private businessman, with a trembling pen," who "come[s] forward alone," out of a sense of

a "great and important duty to [the] race," a responsibility its leaders have "failed to discharge." Washington could not have imagined how exponentially Stowe's pen and the presses printing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would amplify his antislavery, pro-colonization argument and spread it around the world, including to Liberia.[14]

LIBERIA IN *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

While the fictional letter written by George Harris in chapter 43 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* maintains the reconciliation of abolition and colonization in Washington's essay, Washington's moderate tone and logic are largely lost in Stowe's translation. After claiming that Liberia realizes God's vision and thereby overcomes the division of the two movements, Harris urges, "Let us, then, all take hold together, with all our might, and see what we can do with this new enterprise" (441). As with Washington, such cooperation is the means to ultimately separatist ends. But whereas Washington's turn to Liberia derives from his frustration with the structural limitations placed on blacks' opportunities for advancement in the United States, Harris's stems from a racialist understanding of nation—one that imagines full citizenship in the United States as only possible through the complete absorption of black by white. Harris therefore concludes that a fully black nation in Africa is the necessary alternative. Responding to his correspondent's suggestion that the light-skinned Harris and his family might "mingle in the circle of whites," Harris counters, "I have no wish to pass for an American, or to identify myself with them. It is with the oppressed, enslaved African race that I cast in my lot." He emphatically links race and nation by adding, "If I wished anything, I would wish myself two shades darker, rather than one lighter" (440). In imagining "an African *nationality*," which Harris defines as "a people that shall have a tangible, separate existence of its own," his vision focuses not on the United States and Liberia as twin republics, as Washington's does, but on Liberia and its potential to "plant" in Africa numerous "mighty republics, that, growing with the rapidity of tropical vegetation, shall be for all coming ages" (441).[15]

That Harris takes a more extreme position than Washington with respect to racial and imperial nationalism is an important reason why fewer critics have recognized Washington as an important influence on both the colonization debate and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, though he would have been more readily apparent as such to nineteenth-century readers.[16] In concluding his

Tribune essay, Washington predicted that the impact of his arguments likely would be limited because of his "attempting to be just to three classes"—abolitionists, colonizationists, and blacks, whom Washington presents here as separate and competing groups who do not recognize their shared interests and aims. Recognizing that his identity as a black would trump that of colonizationist and abolitionist, he reduced his expectations to, as he presents it in his essay, "provok[ing] an inquiry among Afric-Americans [*sic*]" into Liberia.[17] But as we see in the issue of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* for 31 July 1851, Washington's piece caught and held the attention of those on both sides of the colonization debate, winning the favor of white colonizationists and provoking the black abolitionist Douglass to decry, "Mr. Augustus Washington, a colored man of more than ordinary talents, has, in the agony of despair, written a long article in the New York Tribune commending the whole infernal scheme which at present is filling the whole Colonization ranks with rejoicing. Oh! when will our people learn that they have the power to crush this viper which is stinging our very life away?"[18]

Two months later, Douglass's *Paper* published further pro- and anti-colonization responses to Washington's essay. Among them is an article from the *Christian Statesman* praising Washington as "a man of superior ability and wisdom," who, with his "single article" in support of colonization, has done more "to advance the welfare and elevate the character of his race than Douglass, with perhaps equal ability, but without judgment and temper, has accomplished in ten years of mad declamation upon the present heart-broken condition of the colored brethren."[19] (Notably, Douglass tempered this praise of Washington, as well as implicitly defended himself, by publishing a letter to his *Paper*, in the same issue, condemning Washington's essay as "fulsome, incoherent, stale, [and] self-contradicting.")[20] While Douglass resisted the *Statesman*'s recommendation that he model himself after Washington with respect to his stand on colonization, his *Paper* continued to publish notices about Washington's accomplishments as a daguerreotypist and even about Washington's successes after emigrating to Liberia, which suggests that Douglass was capable of a "liberal and comprehensive view" of this man who encouraged his peers to take just such a perspective, even if Douglass disagreed with Washington's politics.[21]

Douglass also viewed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* liberally and comprehensively, praising it repeatedly for its compelling antislavery message, despite its Washington-influenced colonizationist conclusion and its condemnation by other black leaders.[22] In defending the novel to Martin Delany in an ex-

change in his *Paper*, Douglass declares, "We shall not [. . .] allow the sentiments put in the brief letter of GEORGE HARRIS, at the close of Uncle Tom's Cabin, to vitiate forever Mrs. Stowe's power to do us good."[23] Whether or not he recognized the similarities between Washington's essay and Harris's letter, Douglass clearly found aspects of Washington's life and Stowe's fiction similarly useful to his own arguments for the advancement of African Americans and continued to follow the progress of both in his *Paper*—all the way to Liberia.

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN IN LIBERIA

Among the "Gleanings of News" in the issue of his *Paper* for 22 April 1853, Douglass reprinted the following notice from the *Maryland Colonization Journal*:

> UNCLE TOM'S CABIN IN LIBERIA.—This work, as might be supposed, has created no little sensation in Liberia, but will not likely be translated into any native African Lingo. A *critical* remark of one of our correspondents, to whom we had sent a copy, is rather peculiar, and no doubt, will be considered quite complimentary to the author. After thanking us for the copy, and expressing his gratification in its perusal, he says, "there must be some mistake about George Harris' coming to Liberia, he certainly is not here and has not, been here, unless under an assumed name!"[24]

Douglass published the piece without adding editorial commentary. Doing so left his readers to interpret the compliment paid to Stowe by her unspecified Liberian reader as further evidence of the novel's realistic development of its characters—or, at least, of the frequency with which its readers so readily conflated fiction and reality. Even without his commentary, the republished notice suggests that Douglass recognized the lifelike nature of Stowe's characters as powerfully affecting readers, hopefully to the point that they would act on their feelings, to end slavery and advance black rights.[25]

In shifting to glean what we can from the few Liberian responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that I have been able to locate, it is significant that the brief notice in Douglass's *Paper* mentions that the novel was being read there in English and that it was unlikely to be translated into any African languages. Beyond confirming that the copies circulating in Liberia were imported

from the United States or England, as almost all books were then, it implies that the novel's audience was limited to emigrants from the United States and to native Africans who had become literate in English; only the elite of both the settler and native populations would have been able to read the novel and to afford the steep price of an imported book. As Liberia's ruling class, settler readers were especially sensitive to the novel's favorable representation of their new home, taking it as powerful confirmation that they had made the right decision to emigrate, as well as of their right to rule as an educated and cultured elite.

One such reader and leader was Edward W. Blyden, a West Indian who emigrated to Liberia in 1850 after having been refused admission to Rutgers Theological Seminary in the United States; he became a prominent advocate of the republic's successes, through correspondence with colonization supporters in the United States and England and as editor of the *Liberian Herald*.[26] An 1853 letter written to John B. Pinney of the American Colonization Society (ACS) and published in the *African Repository* reveals that Blyden was a voracious reader of print imported into Liberia, with an especially keen eye for how the contentious republic was being represented in the United States. After observing, "with much pleasure," that "several American papers take ground in favor of the recognition of Liberia by the United States government," he notes that he was "very agreeably surprised at noticing that Mrs. Harriet B. Stowe, at the close of her inimitable 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' represents an intelligent colored man in America, educated abroad, as expressing a desire for an 'African nationality,' and as intending to emigrate to Liberia." Blyden reads George Harris's letter as evidence of Stowe "favoring the idea that it is the position which every intelligent colored man should take, and giving it to the world to understand that it is, in her opinion, the ground which every enlightened colored man ought to and eventually occupy."[27] That Blyden deployed a fictional letter and character modeled after the actual person and writing of Augustus Washington as inspiration for the position that all "enlightened" blacks should take in favor of colonization reveals the easy and frequent slippage that occurred between representation and reality with respect to Liberia and Liberians. Moreover, it reveals the power of representation—in this case, a memorable character from an extremely popular novel—to fulfill a colonizationist vision that remained more prospective than accomplished in reality.

By the time Blyden had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, though, Stowe herself had taken a more complicated position on colonization than Blyden's letter

suggests. At the 1853 annual meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS), the society's corresponding secretary

> read an extract from a note from Mrs. Stowe to the effect, that she had no sympathy with the coercive policy of the Colonization Society, but thought Liberia now a "fixed fact," and that the opportunity there afforded of sustaining a republican government of free people of color ought not to be disregarded by them or their friends; concluding with an assurance that she was "not a Colonizationist."[28]

Stowe's personal secretary Leonard W. Bacon was present at the meeting and reported that "Mrs. Stowe had told him, that if she were to write 'Uncle Tom' again, she would not send George Harris to Liberia." Even so, Stowe imagined that Harris "would there, in freedom, establish a good name and fame, which would be important in its reaction, in abolishing distinctions of caste; and she looked to the colony as one of the great agents by which the colored race were to be elevated and dignified in the eyes of the lofty and contemptuous Saxon."[29] While the AFASS trumpeted Stowe's statements as a recanting of her novel's prominent advocacy of colonization and as resulting from negative reactions from black and white abolitionists, we see that her withdrawal of support was from the ACS only and not from Liberia and its emigrants. Among these emigrants, she imagined her fictional character—much like her novel's unspecified Liberian reader in Douglass's reprint—living as if he were a real person and helping to realize the full potential of both the young republic on distant shores and the race alike.

Stowe's character Topsy, whom the conclusion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sends to Africa as a missionary after her conversion to Christianity and emancipation by Ophelia, was similarly deployed in pro-colonization representations as if she were living proof of Liberia's viability. We see this in the article "A Glance at 'Topsey's' [*sic*] Home" in the ACS's October 1853 *African Repository*. Reprinted from a periodical titled the *Independent* (with an unspecified place of publication), the article is written from the perspective of someone who has seen firsthand the "thriving town of Monrovia," "walk[ed] through its wide, well-shaded streets, look[ed] at the school-houses, churches, court-house, and even pass[ed] into the 'Government Buildings,'" all of which "falsify forever the assertion, 'they are neither capable of governing or supporting themselves.'"[30] While the article discusses neither *Uncle Tom's Cabin* nor its character Topsy directly, its title invokes the latter (with an alternate

spelling) and invites readers to imagine Tops(e)y as a living person who is realizing her full capacities along with other Liberians, through emancipation, conversion to Christianity, education, and emigration to a black nation in need of just such model citizens.

Pro-colonization writers were not alone in supporting a cause by exploiting the widely familiar characters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as if they were actual people living in Liberia. Recognizing that the novel's readers had come to think of its characters as actual people and to feel favorably disposed toward them, a Liberian named Alfred T. Wood was tried and convicted in Monrovia in 1856 for committing a "libel on the Republic." His crime, more specifically, was defrauding English donors to a fund for a never-to-be-built church in Monrovia, by advertising George Harris and his wife as members. A notice in the January 1856 *African Repository* declared Wood's sentence of five years in prison and fine of five hundred dollars as his just deserts for using Stowe's fiction to advance his own, at the expense of the republic's fragile reputation abroad.[31] As Wood's swindle reveals, Liberia was far away from America and England and, as a result, could only be understood through necessarily mediated accounts of conditions and people there. As we have seen, representations of the distant republic typically offered up examples of successes in its early development, as grounds for imagining a full-fledged and thriving nation in the not-too-distant future. Accordingly, this inevitable tension between the republic's fictional and factual existence lent to easy slippages between fiction and reality and to opportunistic exploitations of their interchangeability, by pro-colonizationists seeking material support for the venture and by swindlers lining their own pockets.

Such representations of Liberia and Liberians had even higher stakes. Nothing less than the capacities of people of African descent for self-government and self-sufficiency were on trial in the court of global public opinion (swayed toward doubt by the racist science of ethnology), and the unsaved souls of native Africans were at risk in the eyes of evangelical Christians.[32] Powerful whites in the United States and England had invested significant capital and their reputations in the experiment, and their religious and social aims were thoroughly entangled with economic ones, as they envisioned that the untapped moral and natural resources of an entire continent were available for conversion and commoditization. As debates about the viability of the recently independent republic raged and as emigrants' reports home about conditions there frequently contradicted each other, supporters of the project were especially eager to

introduce some kind of tangible, indisputable proof that Liberia and its people were not just surviving but flourishing—spiritually, economically, and politically.

In the summer of 1854, Augustus Washington produced two daguerreotypes as just such evidence: one featured a view of Monrovia from the harbor lighthouse, and the other showed the Liberian presidential mansion. At the time, daguerreotypy was considered the most accurate and objective form of representation possible; the highly detailed images, promoted as made through the agency of sunlight and chemistry instead of subjective human hands, carried significant authority as evidence.[33] Washington mailed his daguerreotypes to Dr. J. W. Lugenbeel, the ACS's recording secretary in Washington, DC, for engraving and reproduction in the publications of the ACS and its affiliates. Lugenbeel rejected the harbor view, requesting a "*good, clear*, view of Monrovia" and emphasizing that if Washington could not get "a good clear picture it will not answer our purpose."[34] As Lugenbeel's reply makes clear, any ambiguity in evidence of Liberia's fully fledged reality would not advance the colonization project.

Like Washington's daguerreotypes, the exhibition of physical copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Liberian homes was presented as visible and material proof that the ideals of colonization had become a reality. Alexander Crummell, an American minister who emigrated to Liberia in 1853 as a missionary and who became a prominent member of Liberia's elite and an internationally known advocate for the republic, includes Stowe's novel in a list of books and periodicals that could be seen in the "residence of a thriving, thoughtful citizen" of Liberia. In an 1862 lecture on the prominence of the English language in the country, Crummell explains that among the "mass of printed matter" to be expected on the Liberian elites' "bookshelves or tables," one would discover "Bibles, Prayer or Hymn Books, Hervey's Meditations or Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Young's Night Thoughts or Cowper's Poems, Walter Scott's Tales, or Uncle Tom's Cabin," as well as a range of American and English newspapers and magazines.[35] According to the aforementioned brief notice reprinted by Douglass in 1853 to announce the Liberian reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the only copies circulating in Liberia were English-language editions. That the notice indicates there were no plans to translate the novel into African languages is especially remarkable, given that the novel has Christian typological characters and a thoroughly evangelical message and that missionary work such as Crummell's was a significant motivation for African colonization. As Crummell's

list confirms, fifteen years after Liberian independence, books and other print—including *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—remained a luxury accessible only to the country's most elite settlers and possibly to natives who thought that adopting the English language and culture was vital to having any power in their homeland.

It may be that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not translated into the languages spoken in Liberia by native Africans because natives would have recognized that its representations of American slavery too closely resembled conditions in Liberia as well. Emigrants from the United States had imported and established many of the same discriminatory views and practices that they had fled, as we discover in a series of critical letters from Augustus Washington detailing conditions in Liberia after he and his family had emigrated in late 1853. In one of these letters, published in the *New-York Daily Tribune* in 1854 under the title "Liberia as It Is," Washington reports that the native Africans

> are humble, subdued and servile creatures. They are employed in all families as domestic drudges [. . .]. Some few families allow them wages, and thus their servants are decently clothed. But nearly all [. . .] wear nothing but a filthy rag the size of a common cotton handkerchief, about their loins, or occasionally a dirty, greasy shirt; and in this state they perform all duties about houses. In some families they are allowed per day a quart of rice, some palm oil, and otherwise well fed. In other families they are poorly fed from mere scraps of rice and cassada [*sic*]. In others again they are not only worked nearly naked, but half starved. And in nearly all families it is customary to keep a rawhide or cat-o'-nine-tails handy, to flog them when they please. And this flogging, kicking and cuffing is done to a shameful extent by upstart boys, scolding, brainless women, and gentlemen of rank and standing, calling themselves Christians.[36]

This exposé of Liberia's real social and environmental miseries records the daguerreotypist's disillusionment with the colonization ideal that he had promoted and on which Stowe had borrowed. It also offers an authoritative post-emigration corrective to the wholly positive representations of Liberia being published by the ACS and its affiliates and supporters, including those representations coming from Liberia itself and deploying characters from Stowe's novel as living and thriving in the African republic.

Despite his authority as a daguerreotypist and a member of the Liberian elite who broke ranks with both the ACS and his peers in publishing a critical firsthand account of the country, Washington was far from having the last word on Liberia as it actually existed. The ACS continued its work, and its supporters extended their advocacy of Liberia well past the American Civil War and emancipation. As before, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* figures prominently in their later arguments. In an 1883 speech given in Washington, DC, upon the sixty-sixth anniversary of the ACS, Edward Blyden—who had become the president of Liberia College—declared that the "Republic of Liberia now stands before the world—the realization of the dreams of the founders of the American Colonization Society, and in many respects more than the realization."[37] Following this familiar claim, Blyden's speech offers a long view of the history of the ACS and its supporters. Once again, Stowe's novel is introduced as "proof"—in this case, "of the great confidence felt by Mrs. Stowe in the idea of African Colonization—in the mighty results to be achieved through its means for Africa and humanity." Citing Stowe's novel as a milestone in the colonization debate, Blyden claims that "more forcible reasons" never have been "given for the emigration of persons of color from this country [the United States] to that Republic [Liberia] than are presented in the able and eloquent letter which she makes [George Harris] write to set forth is reasons for emigrating." As Blyden still sees it, Harris's letter "shows what a cultivated Anglo-Saxon and an abolitionist feels ought to be the views of an educated and cultivated colored American."[38] Assessing the novel's place in recent history, Blyden declares *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "not only the harbinger of emancipation, but also of the vast colonization which will sooner or later take place." His reasons for using the future tense to indicate this "vast colonization" as still prospective—despite the significant influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the thirty-five-year history of Liberia as an independent republic—become clearer as he concludes his discussion of the novel's ongoing reception: "And that the friends of the African should have seized upon her words in the one capacity and not in the other, can only be explained by the fact that as an angel of Abolition the nation was ready for her; but to receive her as an angel of Colonization, it is only now in the process of preparation."[39]

In traveling from Liberia to the United States to give his speech, Blyden offered not only *Uncle Tom's Cabin* but also himself as powerful evidence in support of a project that continued to be controversial after decades of continuous emigration from the United States to Liberia. The statistics are

telling. In 1851, the year that the majority of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published serially in the *National Era*, 676 American blacks emigrated to Liberia. The next year, when the story finished publication in the *National Era* at the beginning of April and was subsequently published as a novel, 620 emigrated, and in 1853, as its immense popularity continued, there were 783 emigrants.[40] These three years saw the greatest number of emigrants from the United States to Liberia; a comparable pattern emerges only in the three years following the Civil War.[41] In 1883, the year that Blyden gave his speech, only fifty-three emigrated from the United States to Liberia. Given black Americans' dwindling interest in Liberia—even during the difficult and violent transition from emancipation, through Reconstruction, and into the Jim Crow era—it is no wonder that Blyden returned to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to revive the idealism of George Harris's letter and its hopeful vision of fully fledged black African republics, though the actual republic in Liberia was still struggling for viability economically and politically and had reproduced many of the social divisions that settlers had fled. When we return to this extended contest between fiction (including idealization) and reality with respect to Liberia, as well as the significant role of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in that contest, we gain a better understanding of the novel's extensive influence well beyond American borders. We also begin to recognize the novel's utility to black activists arguing for their right to and capacity for self-determination and self-government, a utility that functioned both whether activists were for or against colonization and whether or not the novel's colonizationist conclusion was activated by racism.

CODA: "UNCLE TOM'S RELATIVES"

Even into the twenty-first century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* continues to be read by Liberians and deployed with particular force in arguments about the complicated history and social fabric of their republic. In 2006, the *Perspective*—a "unique upscale magazine" published by the group Liberian Democratic Future and promising to "confront the issues head on by concentrating on telling the truth, exposing the root causes, underlining contributing factors and identifying the class divisions which are the undercurrent of the various problems in Liberia"[42]—published a two-part essay by Siahyonkron Nyanseor titled "The Tradition of Uncle Tom's Relatives." Making good on the magazine's promises, Nyanseor dedicated his essay to historicizing modern-day class divisions in Liberia, tracing their origins to colonization and the earliest days of the nation.

Those in Liberian society whom Nyanseor's essay designates as "Uncle Tom's Relatives" are the descendants of former slaves who emigrated from America and "assimilated and acquired the cultural arrogance"; not only did these emigrants make "invaluable contributions" to Liberia's development, Nyanseor claims, but "many of them assisted the ruling elites in oppressing the African inhabitants."[43] Their designation as "Uncle Tom's Relatives," he explains,

> is derived from Harriet Beecher Stowe's best-known novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin [*sic*], which was first published as a series between 1851 and 1852. It became an enormously popular tale of the injustices of slavery. Uncle Tom, an almost Christ-like model of goodness and charity, was a house slave who was reluctantly sold by his first owners. Ultimately, Simon Legree, a tyrannical overseer, beat Uncle Tom to death after he had exemplified many heart-rending examples of generosity and heroism in the community. The novel is believed to have been a major cause of the Civil War. It popularized the abolitionist movement in the United States. Today, the term Uncle Tom is used pejoratively to describe a black American who is too deferential to whites. Unlike the original Uncle Tom, his Relatives in the Liberian experience are a combination of Tom's tyrannical overseer, Simon Legree and individuals like the Arthur Barclays, the Bill Franks and numerous others who were well socialized and given privileged positions at the expense of the African Liberians. This group and their offspring have an antipathy towards African Liberians.

In exposing the class divisions within Liberian society and linking them to Liberia's colonial connection to the racist and slaveholding nineteenth-century United States, Nyanseor's essay echoes Augustus Washington's critical exposés of both the failed promises of a united and egalitarian black republic and the real consequences of the settler colonialism that black emigrants practiced in its stead, in the name of racial nationalism and Christian evangelism. More significantly, the essay reveals the lasting significance that Stowe's globally popular and influential novel has had for Liberians in their continuing efforts to come to terms with the conflict between the promise and the realities (too often grim) of a nation that was born from both hope and hatred; was tenuously established and sustained via persuasive combinations of fact and fiction, race, nation, and religion; has been neglected by its closest kin (the United States); and has been plagued by poverty, violence, and illness ever since. These people may indeed be rightly considered Uncle Tom's relatives.

Notes

1. Following Jane Tompkins's influential feminist recovery of the "cultural work" of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), major works critiquing the imperialist logic undergirding and extending the novel's sentimentalism and investment in domesticity include Gillian Brown's *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Michelle Burnham's *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682–1861* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997); Amy Kaplan's "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70.3 (September 1998): 582–606; and Etsuko Taketani's *U.S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism, 1825–1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003). Most of this work uses the lens of imperialism, rather than that of colonialism or (the more specific and recently favored term) settler colonialism, to read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Liberian colonization. In this essay, I use the terms that were most commonly used in nineteenth-century discourse about Liberia and other proposed and established colonies for emancipated slaves and free blacks, *colonization* (as in the American Colonization Society) and *emigrants* (the word that Augustus Washington and others used to designate nonnative African settlers of Liberia). By doing so, I do not mean to suggest that Liberia was or is not an instance of settler colonialism or to ignore the complications of how this instance of settler colonialism motivated by racial nationalism and an idea of racial identity with native Africans failed to materialize in practice. Attending more fully and justly to the complications of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with the latter, though, would require a book of its own.

2. For a helpful timeline of important publications and their lifespans in the limited print culture of early Liberia, see Momo K. Rogers Sr., "The Press in Liberia, 1826–1966: A Select Chronology," *Liberian Studies Journal* 22.1 (1997): 95–120.

3. On Walker's and Douglass's anti-colonization positions, see Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). For decades, the most significant scholarship on Liberia and the colonization movement was comprised of P. J. Staudenraus's *The African Colonization Movement, 1816–1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965) and Tom W. Shick's *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). The twenty-first century has seen an increase in attention that includes the perspective of the American Colonization Society and its supporters as well as emigrants: see Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005); Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Claude Andrew Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Amos J. Beyan, *African American Settlements in West Africa: John Brown Russwurm and the American Civilizing Efforts* (New York: Palgrave, 2005); Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

Press, 2007); Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); James Ciment, *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013). Compilations and studies of Liberian emigrants' writings include *Liberian Dreams: Back-to-Africa Narratives from the 1850s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), edited by Wilson Jeremiah Moses, and *Back to Africa: Benjamin Coates and the Colonization Movement in America, 1848–1880*, edited by Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner, Margaret Hope Bacon, and others (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

4. The American Colonization Society established Liberia as a colony in 1821; it became an independent republic in 1847. On the American Colonization Society's strategic uses of print, see Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 37, 214–16.

5. Elizabeth Ammons notes that the "opposition of leaders such as Douglass and Garrison, the history of Liberia, and the progressive condemnation of imperialism today make it difficult to find anything positive in Stowe's support for African American colonization of Liberia." See "Freeing the Slaves and Banishing the Blacks: Racism, Empire, and Africa in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," in *Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin": A Casebook*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 242.

6. Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment*, 120–21.

7. George Harris and Augustus Washington were first linked by Joe Webb in "The George Harris Letter and *African Repository*: New Sources for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *ANQ* 21.4 (Fall 2008): 30–34. For more on Washington as a daguerreotypist and an advocate for Liberian emigration, see Ann Shumard, *A Durable Memento: Portraits by Augustus Washington, African American Daguerreotypist* (Washington, DC: National Portrait Gallery); Marcy J. Dinius, *The Camera and the Press: American Visual and Print Culture in the Age of the Daguerreotype* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), chap. 5.

8. In this essay, I focus more on Washington's arguments for reconciling colonization and abolition than on the similarities between his essay and George Harris's letter. For my previous discussion of the resemblances between Harris's letter and Washington's essay, see Dinius, *The Camera and the Press*, 158–62.

9. Augustus Washington, "African Colonization," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 9 July 1851, reprinted in *African Repository* 27, no. 9 (September 1851): 259–65.

10. Ibid., 262.

11. For an extended analysis of the influence of Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany on Stowe's development of George Harris and the pro-colonization position of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass*, chap. 2. See also Robert B. Stepto's "Sharing the Thunder: The Literary Exchanges of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Bibb, and Frederick Douglass" and Richard Yarborough's "Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel," both in *New Essays on "Uncle Tom's Cabin,"* ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Staudenraus's *African Colonization Movement* offers a detailed history of the fluctuating relationship between abolition and colonization from the eighteenth century through emancipation.

12. Washington, "African Colonization," 262.

13. Ibid., 263.

14. Ibid., 260.

15. For an extended reading of the response of "literate free blacks of the North"—especially that of Delany and Douglass—to the conflicted views on the relationship of race and nation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass*, chap. 2.

16. The primary factor in scholars' neglect of Washington is Stowe's omission of him in her defense of Harris against charges that he was "overdrawn." See Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to "Uncle Tom's Cabin"* (1853; reprint, Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1998), 13–21.

17. Washington, "African Colonization," 265.

18. Frederick Douglass, "African Colonization," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 31 July 1851.

19. "Frederick Douglass and Augustus Washington," *Christian Statesman*, reprinted in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 4 September 1851.

20. Bob Markle, "Communications: The Constitution—Colonization," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 4 September 1851.

21. See, for example, the article "Colored Artists" in Douglass's *Paper* of 15 April 1852, as well as Douglass's reprinting of the "Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society" in his *Paper* of 17 August 1855.

22. Levine offers a detailed examination of Douglass's response to Stowe's novel, in "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*: An Analysis of Reception," *American Literature* 64.1 (March 1992): 71–93.

23. Letter of M. R. Delany, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 6 May 1853.

24. "Gleanings of News," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 22 April 1853.

25. For Douglass's and others' responses to Stowe's characterizations of African Americans in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Levine, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*"; Yarborough, "Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*." Douglass's readers might also notice the Maryland Colonization Society's knowing mockery of a black emigrant who mistakenly thought that a fictional character in a periodical with a mostly white readership was an actual person.

26. For more on Blyden's life and activism, see Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward W. Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

27. Edward W. Blyden, "Letter from Mr. E. W. Blyden," *African Repository* 30, no. 8 (August 1854): 237–39, 239.

28. Appendix to the *Thirteenth Annual Report of the American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, Presented at New-York, May 11, 1853* (New York: John A. Gray, 1853), 192–93.

29. Ibid., 193.

30. "A Glance at 'Topsey's' Home," *Independent*, n.d., reprinted in *African Repository* 29, no. 10 (October 1853): 212.

31. "Trial and Conviction of Alfred T. Wood," *African Repository* 32, no. 1 (January 1856): 29.

32. For an important analysis of influential claims that people of African descent were not capable of self-determination or self-government, made by Thomas Jefferson and other Enlightenment philosophers, and of the role that cultural production, including literature, played in such assessments and in blacks' responses to these claims, see Gene Andrew Jarrett, "'To Refute Mr. Jefferson's Arguments Respecting Us': Thomas Jefferson, David Walker, and the Politics of Early African American Literature," *Early American Literature* 46.2 (2011): 291–318.

33. Dinius (*The Camera and the Press*, introd. and chaps. 4–5) discusses this representational authority at length.

34. Quoted in Carol Johnson, "Faces of Freedom: Portraits from the American Colonization Society Collection," in *The Daguerreian Annual, 1996* (Pittsburgh: Daguerreian Society, 1997), 270.

35. Alexander Crummell, *The Future of Africa: Being Addresses, Sermons, Etc., Etc., Delivered in the Republic of Liberia* (New York: Scribner, 1862), 12–13.

36. Augustus Washington, "Liberia as It Is," pt. 2, *New-York Daily Tribune*, 14 November 1854, 6.

37. Edward W. Blyden, *The Origin and Purpose of African Colonization* (Washington, DC: American Colonization Society, 1883), 14.

38. Ibid., 21.

39. Ibid., 22.

40. For statistics on emigration compiled from ACS records, see the appendix in Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 251.

41. According to Staudenraus (ibid., 251), there were 527 emigrants in 1865, 621 in 1866, and 633 in 1867.

42. "About Us," *Perspective*, http://www.theperspective.org/editorial.html (accessed 5 May 2015).

43. Siahyonkron Nyanseor, "The Tradition of Uncle Tom's Relatives," pt. 1, *Perspective*, 22 May 2006, http://www.theperspective.org/articles/0522200601.html (accessed 5 May 2015).

Uncle Tom's Cabins

The Transnational History of America's Most Mutable Book

Edited by Tracy C. Davis and Stefka Mihaylova

University of Michigan Press ANN ARBOR

First paperback edition 2020
Copyright © 2018 by Tracy C. Davis and Stefka Mihaylova
All rights reserved

For questions or permissions, please contact um.press.perms@umich.edu

Published in the United States of America by the
University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
Printed on acid-free paper

First published March 2018
First published in paperback April 2020

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Davis, Tracy C., 1960– editor. | Mihaylova, Stefka, editor.
Title: Uncle Tom's cabins : the transnational history of America's most mutable book / edited by Tracy C. Davis and Stefka Mihaylova.
Description: Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references and index. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2017052940 (print) | LCCN 2017061153 (ebook) | ISBN 9780472123568 (e-book) | ISBN 9780472037087 (hardback)
Subjects: LCSH: Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 1811–1896. Uncle Tom's cabin. | Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 1811–1896—Influence. | Slavery in literature. | African Americans in literature. | Race in literature. | BISAC: PERFORMING ARTS / General. | LITERARY CRITICISM / American / African American. | SOCIAL SCIENCE / Ethnic Studies / African American Studies. | ART / Performance.
Classification: LCC PS2954.U6 (ebook) | LCC PS2954.U6 U53 2018 (print) | DDC 813/.3—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017052940

ISBN 978-0-472-03776-6 (pbk.)

Cover credit: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, adapted and directed by Behrooz Gharibpour, Bahman Cultural Arts Center, Tehran, Iran (2008); *Onkel Toms Hütte Reloaded*, written by Gerold Theobalt, Kempf Theater, Grünwald, Germany (2015).

Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction 1
Tracy C. Davis and Stefka Mihaylova

I. Destination Points

Oh, Canaan! Following the North Star to Canada 33
Tracy C. Davis

"I Go to *Liberia*": Following *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Africa 59
Marcy J. Dinius

II. Freedom's Pathways

Eliza's French Fathers: Race, Gender, and Transatlantic Paternalism in French Stage Adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1853 81
Emily Sahakian

Representing the Slave Trader: *Haley* and the Slave Ship; or, Spain's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 116
Lisa Surwillo

The Bonds of Translation: A Cuban Encounter with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 139
Kahlil Chaar-Pérez

"Black and White Are One": Anti-Amalgamation Laws, Roma Slaves, and the Romanian Nation on the Mid-nineteenth-century Moldavian Stage 165
Ioana Szeman

"Schwarze Sklaven, Weiße Sklaven": The German Reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 192
Heike Paul