

Appendix 14.1

Assignment Sheet: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Archives of Injustice Edward Whitley

Goal

The purpose of this assignment is twofold: (1) to understand how Stowe collected and synthesized a large body of abolitionist texts into *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and (2) to understand how activists today use digital media to collect and synthesize texts about contemporary social issues such as police brutality, sex trafficking, and modern slavery. As such, the goals of this assignment are to achieve a better understanding of how Stowe shaped the discourses surrounding race and slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and to reflect on how activists in our day use digital media to shape and direct responses to social injustice. This assignment has multiple parts (described below) that you will complete over a series of weeks. You will be graded on each individual component—two in-class oral reports on your research into nineteenth-century abolitionism and twenty-first-century activism, and two written essays reflecting on your research findings—and given a final, cumulative grade at the end of the project.

Central to your inquiry with this assignment will be an effort to reconceive of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a curated archive of responses to slavery and not just a novel. The historian Anna Laura Stoler has described the archive as “a force field that animates political energies and expertise, that pulls on some ‘social facts’ and converts them into qualified knowledge, that attends to some ways of knowing while repelling and refusing others” (*Along the Archival Grain*). By comparing the work of online activists today who seek to “animate political energies” with Stowe’s novelistic form of archival practice, you will gain a greater understanding of nineteenth-century abolitionism, contemporary social activism, and the various methods (and media) used to support (and, potentially, distort) these causes.

Part I

For the first part of this assignment you will work in small groups to explore primary source documents about the abolitionist movement from the following sources:

- *The American Abolitionism Project*:
<http://americanabolitionist.liberalarts.iupui.edu/>
- *The Antislavery Literature Project*: <http://antislavery.eserver.org/>
- *The Black Abolitionist Archive*:
http://research.udmercy.edu/find/special_collections/digital/baa/
- *The Colored Conventions project*: <http://coloredconventions.org>
- *The Digital Library of the Caribbean*: <http://www.dloc.com/dloc1>
- *Documenting the American South*: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>
- *The Gilder Lehrman Center*: <http://glc.yale.edu/>
- "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and American Culture (PreTexts section):
<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sitemap.html>

Subscription databases potentially available through an academic library website:

- 19th Century U.S. Newspaper Digital Archive
- African American Newspapers: 1827–1998
- African American Periodicals: 1825–1995
- African American Newspapers: The 19th Century
- American Periodicals Series Online
- Early American Newspapers, Series II, 1758–1900

Your goal with this part of the assignment is to situate *Uncle Tom's Cabin* within a larger context for abolitionist activism and to identify those aspects of abolitionist discourse that Stowe both included *and* excluded from her novel. (Think of Stowe as an archivist who is curating her collection, choosing which documents to include and which to reject.) Your group will meet during class to discuss themes and ideas from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that you would like to learn more about, and then divide the above list of digital resources among the members of your group to search outside of class for the texts, images, and arguments that Stowe incorporated into her novel.

You will write a short, 500-word essay about your experience situating *Uncle Tom's Cabin* within these primary source documents. Pay particular attention to what Stowe includes from these documents, what she excludes, and what she modifies, distorts, or emphasizes. Bring this essay to class and be prepared to discuss your findings with members of your group. Include the names of specific documents you found, along with their corresponding URLs.

During class we will also look through Stowe's *Key to "Uncle Tom's Cabin,"* which contains many of the primary source documents about slavery that she relied on while writing her novel. As a class, we will compare the abolitionist documents you found with the documents that Stowe herself collected in *Key to "Uncle Tom's Cabin,"* and then discuss what these documents tell us about Stowe's efforts to curate texts about race and slavery into an archive of injustice.

Part II

For the second part of the assignment you will choose a contemporary social issue—such as police brutality, sex trafficking, or modern slavery—and then search the internet to identify the means by which individuals or institutions curate this information online. What digital tools do individuals and institutions employ to curate online archives of information? What are the blogs, Facebook pages, YouTube channels, memes, and Twitter hashtags that activists use not just to create and promote digital content, but also to shape and define the existing content? How do the chosen methods of curation shape, distort, or promote the information in question?

The goal of this part of the assignment is to encourage you to reflect on how information is gathered and structured online and to allow you to draw parallels to the structuring of nineteenth-century abolitionist thought in Stowe's novel. You will write a short, 500-word reflective essay comparing contemporary online activism with the archive of nineteenth-century abolitionism that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* synthesized into a single, exemplary text. Include the names of specific websites, hashtags, Facebook groups, etc.

Questions to consider could include the following:

- Do these digitally curated collections of modern-day injustice help you to understand the world that gave rise to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? If so, how?
- How was Stowe able to synthesize a vast archive of abolitionist thought into a single text, and are contemporary activists attempting to achieve a similar kind of synthesis?
- Do activists fighting police brutality, sex trafficking, and modern slavery need an exemplary text like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to promote their cause, or do these activists consider the online archives of injustice that individuals and institutions curate every day to be better at raising consciousness and effecting change?
- What would the archive of nineteenth-century abolitionism have looked like without Stowe's galvanizing text?
- How did Stowe's position as a white Northerner affect her curation of an archive that included texts by and about African Americans? What are people saying about the efforts of such white (or first-world) allies today?