6. What light does the evidence shed on the causes of the Civil War? What was the significance of the conflicting arguments of Stowe and George Frederick Holmes? What did Holmes's analysis reveal about the character of intellectual, social, and political discourse in the 1850s?

1. Harriet Beecher Stowe Portrays Slavery's Brutality, 1852

“And now,” said Legree, “come here, you Tom. You see I telled ye I didn’t buy ye jest for the common work; I mean to promote ye and make a driver of ye; and tonight ye may jest as well begin to get yer hand in. Now, ye jest take this yer gal and flog her; ye’ve seen enough on’t to know how.”

“I beg Mas’r’s pardon,” said Tom, “hopes Mas’r won’t set me at that. It’s what I ain’t used to—never did—and can’t do, no way possible.”

“Yell learn a pretty smart chance of things ye never did know before I’ve done with ye!” said Legree, taking up a cowhide and striking Tom a heavy blow across the cheek, and following up the infliction by a shower of blows.

“Ther!” he said, as he stopped to rest, “now will ye tell me ye can’t do it?”

“Yes, Mas’r,” said Tom, putting up his hand to wipe the blood that trickled down his face. “I’m willing to work night and day, and work while there’s life and breath in me, but this yer thing I can’t feel it right to do; and, Mas’r, I never shall do it—never!”

Tom had a remarkably smooth, soft voice, and a habitually respectful manner that had given Legree an idea that he would be cowardly and easily subdued. When he spoke these last words, a thrill of amazement went through everyone; the poor woman clasped her hands and said, “O Lord!” and everyone involuntarily looked at each other and drew in their breath, as if to prepare for the storm that was about to burst.

Legree looked stupefied and confounded; but at last burst forth—

“What! ye blasted black beast! tell me ye don’t think it right to do what I tell ye! What have any of you cussed cattle to do with thinking what’s right? I’ll put a stop to it! Why, what do ye think ye are? May be ye think ye’re a gentleman, master-Tom, to be a telling your master what’s right and what ain’t! So you pretend it’s wrong to flog the gall!”

“I think so, Mas’r,” said Tom, “the poor crittur’s sick and feeble; ’t would be downright cruel, and it’s what I never will do, not begin to. Mas’r, if you mean to kill me, kill me; but as to my raising my hand agin anyone here, I never shall—I’ll die first!”

Tom spoke in a mild voice but with a decision that could not be mistaken. Legree shook with anger; his greenish eyes glared fiercely and his very whiskers seemed to curl with passion; but, like some ferocious beast that plays with its victim before it devours it, he kept back his strong impulse to proceed to immediate violence and broke out into bitter raillery.

“Well, here’s a pious dog, at last, let down among us sinners!—a saint, a gentleman, and no less, to talk to us sinners about our sins! Powerful, holy crittur, he must be! Here, you rascal, you make believe to be so pious—didn’t you never hear out of yer Bible, ‘Servants, obey yer masters’? An’t I yer master? Didn’t I pay down $1,200 cash for all there is inside yer old cussed black shell? An’t yer mine, now, body and soul?” he said, giving Tom a violent kick with his heavy boot. “Tell me!”

In the very depth of physical suffering, bowed by brutal oppression, this question shot a gleam of joy and triumph through Tom’s soul. He suddenly stretched himself up, and, looking earnestly to heaven, while the tears and blood that flowed down his face mingled, he exclaimed—

“No! no! no! my soul an’t yours, Mas’r! You haven’t bought it—ye can’t buy it! It’s been bought and paid for by one that is able to keep it—no matter, no matter, you can’t harm me!”

“I can’t!” said Legree, with a sneer, “we’ll see—we’ll see! Here, Sambo, Quimbo, give this dog such a breakin’ in as he won’t get over this month!”

The two gigantic Negroes that now laid hold of Tom, with fiendish exultation in their faces, might have formed no unapt personification of the powers of darkness. The poor woman screamed with apprehension and all arose as by a general impulse while they dragged him unresisting from the place. . . .
2. A Southern Woman’s Response to Slavery and the Abolitionist Attack, 1861

On one side Mrs. Stowe, Greeley, Thoreau, Emerson, Sumner. They live in nice New England homes, clean, sweet-smelling, shut up in libraries, writing books which ease their hearts of their bitterness against us. What self-denial they do practice is to tell John Brown to come down here and cut our throats in Christ’s name. . . .

The Mrs. Stowes have the plaudits of crowned heads; we take our chances, doing our duty as best we may among the woolly heads. My husband supported his plantation by his law practice. Now it is running him in debt. Our people have never earned their own bread. Take this estate, what does it do, actually? It all goes back in some shape to what are called slaves here, called operatives, or tenants, or peasantry elsewhere. I doubt if ten thousand in money ever comes to this old gentleman’s hands. When Mrs. Chesnut married South, her husband was as wealthy as her brothers-in-law. How is it now? Their money had accumulated for their children. This old man’s goes to support a horde of idle dirty Africans, while he is abused as a cruel slave owner. I say we are no better than our judges in the North, and no worse. We are human beings of the nineteenth century and slavery has to go, of course. All that has been gained by it goes to the North and to Negroes. The slave owners, when they are good men and women, are the martyrs. I hate slavery. I even hate the harsh authority I see parents think it their duty to exercise toward their children.

3. A Southern Critique of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, 1852

This is a fiction—professedly a fiction; but, unlike other works of the same type, its purpose is not amusement, but proselytism. The romance was formerly employed to divert the leisure, recreate the fancy, and quicken the sympathies of successive generations, changing its complexion and enlarging the compass of its aims with the expanding tastes of different periods; but never forgetting that its main object was to kindle and purify the imagination, while fanning into a livelier flame the slumbering charities of the human heart. But, in these late and evil days, the novel, notwithstanding those earlier associations, has descended from its graceful and airy home, and assumed to itself a more vulgar mission, incompatible with its essence and alien to its original design. Engaging in the coarse conflicts of life, and mingling in the fumes and gross odours of political or polemical dissension, it has attained and tainted the robe of ideal purity. . . .

It should be observed that the whole tenor of this pathetic tale derives most of its significance and colouring from a distorted representation or a false conception of the sentiments and feelings of the slave. It presupposes an identity of sensibilities between the races of the free and the negroes, whose cause it pretends to advocate. It takes advantage of this presumption, so suspiciously credited where slavery is unknown, to arouse sympathies for what might be grievous misery to the white man, but is none to the differently tempered black. Every man adapts himself and his feelings more or less to the circumstances of his condition; without this wise provision of nature life would be intolerable to most of us. . . . The joys and the sorrows of the slave are in harmony with his position, and are entirely dissimilar from what would make the happiness, or misery, of another class. It is therefore an entire fallacy, or a criminal perversion of truth, according to the motive of the writer, to attempt to test all situations by the same inflexible rules, and to bring to the judgment of the justice of slavery the prejudices and opinions which have been formed when all the characteristics of slavery are not known but imagined. . . .

We maintain that the distinguishing characteristic of slavery is its tendency to produce effects exactly opposite to those laid to its charge; to diminish the amount of individual misery in the servile
classes; to mitigate and alleviate all the ordinary sorrows of life; to protect the slaves against want as well as against material and mental suffering; to prevent the separation and dispersion of families; and to shield them from the frauds, the crimes, and the casualties of others, whether masters or fellow-slaves, in a more eminent degree than is attainable under any other organization of society, where slavery does not prevail. This is but a small portion of the peculiar advantages to the slaves themselves resulting from the institution of slavery, but these suffice for the present, and furnish a most overwhelming refutation of the philanthropic twaddle of this and similar publications.

It is needless to repeat the evidence that the average condition of the slave at the South is infinitely superior, morally and materially, in all respects, to that of the labouring class under any other circumstances in any other part of the world.

We dismiss Uncle Tom’s Cabin with the conviction and declaration that every holier purpose of our nature is misguided, every charitable sympathy betrayed, every loftier sentiment polluted, every moral purpose wrenched to wrong, and every patriotic feeling outraged, by its criminal prostitution of the high functions of the imagination to the pernicious intrigues of sectional animosity, and to the petty calumnies of willful slander.

4. Stowe as Antislavery Propagandist, 1852

“Well,” said George, “we both work hard for our money, and we don’t owe anybody a cent; and why shouldn’t we have our treats, now and then, as well as rich folks?”

And gayly passed the supper hour; the tea-kettle sung, the baby crowed, and all chatted and laughed abundantly.

“I’ll tell you,” said George, wiping his mouth, “these times are quite another thing from what it used to be down in Georgia. I remember then old Mas’r used to hire me out by the year; and one time, I remember, I came and paid him in two hundred dollars,—every cent I’d taken. He just looked it over, counted it, and put it in his pocket-book, and said, ‘You are a good boy, George,’—and he gave me half-a-dollar!”

“I want to know, now!” said his wife.

“Yes, he did, and that was every cent I ever got of it; and, I tell you, I was mighty bad off for clothes, them times.”

“Well, well, the Lord be praised, they’re over, and you are in a free country now!” said the wife, as she rose thoughtfully from the table, and brought her husband the great Bible. The little circle were ranged around the stove for evening prayers.

“Henry, my boy, you must read,—you are a better reader than your father,—thank God, that let you learn early!”

The boy, with a cheerful readiness, read, “The Lord is my shepherd,” and the mother gently stilled the noisy baby, to listen to the holy words. Then all kneeled, while the father, with simple earnestness, poured out his soul to God.

They had but just risen,—the words of Christian hope and trust scarce died on their lips,—when the door was burst open, and two men entered; and one of them, advancing, laid his hand on the father’s shoulder. “This is the fellow,” said he.

“You are arrested in the name of the United States!” said the other.

“Gentlemen, what is this?” said the poor man, trembling.

“Are you not the property of Mr. B., of Georgia?” said the officer.

“Gentlemen, I’ve been a free, hard-working man, these ten years.”

“Yes, but you are arrested, on suit of Mr. B., as his slave.”

Shall we describe the leave-taking?—the sorrowing wife, the dismayed children, the tears, the anguish,—that simple, honest, kindly home, in a moment so desolated! Ah, ye who defend this because it is law, think, for one hour, what if this that happens to your poor brother should happen to you!...

It was a crowded court-room, and the man stood there to be tried—for life?—no; but for the life of liberty!

Lawyers hurried to and fro, buzzing, consulting, bringing authorities,—all anxious, zealous, engaged,—for what?—to save a fellow-man from
bondage?—no! anxious and zealous lest he might escape,—full of zeal to deliver him over to slavery. The poor man’s anxious eyes follow vainly the busy course of affairs, from which he dimly learns that he is to be sacrificed—on the altar of the Union; and that his heart-break and anguish, and the tears of his wife, and the desolation of his children, are, in the eyes of these well-informed men, only the bleat of a sacrifice, bound to the horns of the glorious American altar!

5. Black Potential and the Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin, 1853

In conducting the education of negro, mulatto, and quadroon children, the writer has often observed this fact:—that for a certain time, and up to a certain age, they kept equal pace with, and were often superior to, the white children with whom they were associated; but that there came a time when they became indifferent to learning, and made no further progress. This was invariably at the age when they were old enough to reflect upon life, and to perceive that society had no place to offer them for which anything more would be requisite than the rudest and most elementary knowledge. . . .

Does not every one know that, without the stimulus which teachers and parents thus continually present, multitudes of children would never gain a tolerable education? And is it not the absence of all such stimulus which has prevented the negro child from an equal advance?

It is often objected to the negro race that they are frivolous and vain, passionately fond of show, and are interested only in trifles. And who is to blame for all this? Take away all high aims, all noble ambition, from any class, and what is left for them to be interested in but trifles?

The present Attorney-general of Liberia, Mr. Lewis, is a man who commands the highest respect for talent and ability in his position; yet, while he was in America, it is said that, like many other young coloured men, he was distinguished only for finery and frivolity. What made the change in Lewis after he went to Liberia? Who does not see the answer? Does any one wish to know what is inscribed on the seal which keeps the great stone over the sepulchre of African mind? It is this,—which was so truly said by poor Topsy,—“NOTHING BUT A NIGGER.”

It is this, burnt into the soul by the branding-iron of cruel and unchristian scorn, that is a sorer and deeper wound than all the physical evils of slavery together.

There never was a slave who did not feel it. Deep, deep down in the dark, still waters of his soul is the conviction, heavier, bitterer than all others, that he is not regarded as a man.
6. Promoting *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ca. 1854

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