

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key To Uncle Tom's Cabin*, (1853)

*[After the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin, Southerners accused Stowe of misrepresenting slavery. In order to show that she had neither lied about slavery nor exaggerated the plight of enslaved people, she compiled A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin. The book was subtitled "Presenting the Original Facts and Documents upon Which the Story Is Founded, Together with Corroborative Statements Verifying the Truth of the Work." In this Key she provided citations and documentation to a vast number of testimonials to slave conditions (whether from slave narratives, news articles, fugitive slave advertisements, abolitionist publications collecting testimony, etc.) She asserted that almost all the incidents she had depicted were drawn from real life, and in her Key went through her book in great detail, chapter-by-chapter, to show this.*

*The Key sold over 90,000 copies in its first month.*

*Library of Congress records show that Lincoln, during his presidency, had withdrawn a copy of the Key to study slave conditions.]*

Excerpts from Preface and Chapter 1:

The great object of the author in writing has been to bring this subject of slavery, as a moral and religious question, before the minds of all those who profess to be followers of Christ, in this country. A minute history has been given of the action of the various denominations on this subject.

The writer has aimed, as far as possible, to say what is true, and only that, without regard to the effect which it may have upon any person or party. She hopes that what she has said will be examined without bitterness, —in that serious and earnest spirit which is appropriate for the examination of so very serious a subject. It would be vain for her to indulge the hope of being wholly free from error. In the wide field which she has been called to go over, there is a possibility of many mistakes. She can only say that she has used the most honest and earnest endeavors to learn the truth.

The book is commended to the candid attention and earnest prayers of all true Christians, throughout the world. May they unite their prayers that Christendom may be delivered from so great an evil as slavery! . . .

At different times, doubt has been expressed whether the representations of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” are a fair representation of slavery as it at present exists. This work, more, perhaps, than any other work of fiction that ever was written, has been a collection and arrangement of real incidents, —of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered, —grouped together with reference to a general result, in the same manner that the mosaic artist groups his fragments of various stones into one general picture. His is a mosaic of gems, —this is a mosaic of facts.

Artistically considered, it might not be best to point out in which quarry and from which region each fragment of the mosaic picture had its origin; and it is equally unartistic to disentangle the glittering web of fiction, and show out of what real warp and woof it is woven, and with what real coloring dyed. But the book had a purpose entirely transcending the artistic one, and accordingly encounters, at the hands of the public, demands not usually made on fictitious works. It is *treated* as a reality, — sifted, tried and tested, as a reality; and therefore, as a reality it may be proper that it should be defended.

The writer acknowledges that the book is a very inadequate representation of slavery; and it is so, necessarily, for this reason, —that slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it 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.

The author will now proceed along the course of the story, from the first page onward, and develop, as far as possible, the incidents by which different parts were suggested.