ABSTRACT

"THE MORAL LAW WITHIN": THE MORALITY OF THE ENSLAVED
IN THREE AMERICAN NOVELS

By Jennifer L. Loomis

Scholarly work on slave literature has often focused on the immorality of white slaveholders, but slavery presented its most profound challenge, perhaps, to those who were actually enslaved. As a step toward recognizing the complicated human relationships created by the institution of slavery and acknowledging the full, complex humanity of the enslaved, this thesis examines the ethical dilemmas facing slaves as represented in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), Octavia E. Butler's Kindred (1979), and James McEachin's Tell Me a Tale: A Novel of the Old South (1996). These novels cover the spectrum of possible ethical responses to enslavement, ranging from refusing to harm a master to killing whites in retaliation for the abuses of slavery. Because authors often address their own ethical concerns through the plight of their slave characters in complex and interesting ways, the study of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature dealing with slavery allows readers and critics to explore how writers represent fictional slaves in ways that engage not just the morality of slaveholding but also other ethical concerns of their societies. Writing immediately after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, Stowe creates Uncle Tom as a moral model for her white middle-class readers. Writing in response to the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Butler avers that misrepresentations of the past distort the realities of slavery and the ethical courage that it took to survive enslavement. McEachin, responding to the court cases involving Rodney King and O. J. Simpson in the 1990s, challenges readers to consider the ethical implications of storytelling and asserts that before the United States can overcome its racial divisions, Americans must learn to tell the truth about their past.

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe,
the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them:
the starry heavens above and the moral law within.
—Immanuel Kant, Critical Examination of Practical Reason

As early as 1773, American literature was exploring the ethical issues intertwined with slavery. That year, Phillis Wheatley became the first African American writer to have her work, Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, published. Notably, this first book published by an African American was written by a slave who, as she struggled with religious and moral issues in her poems, urged readers to see the plight of slaves reflected in the plight of American colonists, who were just two years away from beginning their own fight for freedom from England. Even one of the country's founders, Thomas Jefferson, was himself very aware of the incongruity between the image of the United States that he painted in the Declaration of Independence and the reality of slavery in the country. In the 1780s, he questioned in his Notes on the State of Virginia whether God would allow the nation to continue its enslavement of black Americans and feared the possible consequences:

> And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that

> his justice cannot sleep for ever [. . .]. The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest. (173)

Nearly seventy years later, Harriet Beecher Stowe undertook the writing of Uncle Tom's Cabin as a means of encouraging Americans to examine the immorality of slavery. Like Wheatley and Jefferson, Stowe considered the ethical impact of slavery in terms of Christian morals. In her follow-up to the novel, The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, Stowe writes, "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 America" (vi). For Stowe, speaking out against slavery was required by "the moral law within." She knew slavery to be unjust and therefore considered herself morally required to speak against it.

For Americans, it is likely that "the moral law within" was challenged more by the issue of slavery than any other that has faced the nation since its inception. American literature, of course, has reflected and continues to reflect this ethical struggle. Slavery has been part of the United States from the beginning, and the problems of slavery did not end with emancipation but continue to influence the present condition of race relations. It is easy, in hindsight, to see the wrongs of slavery and to condemn those white Americans who held slaves without seemingly recognizing the ethical conflicts it raised. Similarly, it is easy to idealize those who were enslaved, which also threatens, ironically, to continue their dehumanization.

Susan Stanford Friedman warns against simplifying human beings to the binaries of villain and victim. In a 1995 Signs article, "Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse," Friedman argues that the exploration of binaries,

such as that of slave and master, tends to degenerate into a simple contrast between polar opposites. Friedman is concerned specifically with "feminist discourses about race and ethnicity [that] are too often caught up in repetitive cultural narratives structured around the white/other binary: victims and victimizers, colonized and colonizers, slaves and masters, dominated and dominators, 'us and them,' the 'good guys against the bad guys'" (5). Her argument, when applied to slave literature, warns that all too easily the relationship between slave and master can be oversimplified into a simple battle of good versus evil. She writes:

> I want neither to deconstruct nor to displace this binary thinking. But I do believe that by themselves such binaries create dead ends. They must be supplemented by what I call relational narratives in which the agonistic struggle between victim and victimizer is significantly complicated [. . .]. The legitimate insight of binary narratives is blind to many other stories that cannot be fully contained within them. (6-7)

Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Octavia E. Butler's Kindred, and James McEachin's Tell Me a Tale: A Story of the Old South are significant because they are "stories that cannot be fully contained within" binaries. Instead, these works succeed in focusing on the complex human relationships created by the institution of slavery. The following exploration of the works of Stowe, Butler, and McEachin considers the ways in which these three writers examine the ethical dynamics created by the institution of slavery. The relationships between masters and slaves were complicated, but perhaps more important in ethical terms is that masters' and slaves' understanding of themselves, as well as their ability to develop and act on moral reasoning, was also complicated by the system of slavery.

Obviously, the question of morality in this country has always been intertwined with slavery. Not always obvious, however, is how the ethical questions raised by slavery did not apply only to slaveholders. Slavery also created moral difficulties for politicians, religious leaders, and merchants who were often trying to define their places in a society that based its economic security on slavery. Possibly, though, slavery's most profound and yet most overlooked moral challenge was presented to those who were actually enslaved. What, if anything, was the moral "obligation" of the slave? Perhaps the only freedom that some slaves were able to preserve was their "choice" of how to handle enslavement.

Escaped slaves such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman are heroes in American culture. Is it because they escaped that our society values these individuals, one might wonder, or do we esteem them because of the successes they had in the next phase of their lives? Do we value as highly—or at all—the slaves who escaped and lived quiet, ordinary lives thereafter? What about the nameless millions who did not escape? Or the ones who could have escaped but chose not to, either out of fear or a sense of duty to their masters or to other slaves? Many Americans have tended to avoid these delicate and challenging questions. When such questions have been entertained, it is usually for the purpose of condemning violence on the part of the oppressed. This condemnation is obvious in the contemporary reactions to the uprisings of enslaved rebels such as Gabriel Prosser in 1800, Denmark Vesey in 1822, and Nat Turner in 1831. Even abolitionists themselves were divided over the correct moral response to slavery. Some, like the outspoken William Lloyd Garrison, "deplor[ed] the violence of the rebellion but [saw] it as a consequence of the institution of slavery" (Greenberg 30). After Nat Turner's rebellion, Garrison wrote in The Liberator:

> The slaves need no incentives [to revolt]. They will find them in their stripes—in their emaciated bodies—in their ceaseless toil—in their ignorant minds—in every field, in every valley, on every hill-top and mountain, wherever you and your fathers have fought for liberty—in your speeches, your conversations, your celebrations, your pamphlets, your newspapers—voices in the air, sounds from across the ocean, invitations to resistance above, below, around them! (71)

Others, such as David Walker, considered violence a just and necessary reaction to enslavement. Walker's 1829 Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World addressed slaves directly:

> Now, I ask you, had you not rather be killed than to be a slave to a tyrant, who takes the life of your mother, wife, and dear little children? Look upon your mother, wife and children, and answer God Almighty; and believe this, that it is no more harm for you to kill a man, who is trying to kill you, than it is for you to take a drink of water when thirsty; in fact, the man who will stand still and let another murder him, is worse than an infidel, and, if he has common sense, ought not to be pitied. (28)

Some years later in an 1843 address, black abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet followed in Walker's footsteps when he urged slaves to act as "men" and defend their families: "You act as though you were made for the special use of these devils. You act as though your daughter were born to pamper the lusts of your masters and overseers. And worse than all," he asserted, "you tamely submit while your lords tear your wives from your embraces and defile them before your eyes. In the name of God, we ask, are you men?" (9).

Although much literature has been written condemning the moral shortcomings of slaveholders, it is still not clear what was, if anything, the moral responsibility of the *enslaved*. Should a slave be a faithful servant? Attempt escape? Kill his or her master? Enact revenge? And what is the correct decision, morally speaking? In this thesis, I cannot, and will not, provide an answer to that question. Rather, I will explore the continuum of moral behaviors as exemplified in American three novels: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Kindred, and Tell Me a Tale: A Novel of the Old South. These specific novels were chosen because of the range they cover on a moral continuum. Even though each main character's moral response to enslavement is unique, each author presents those actions as being the correct ethical reaction within the character's particular circumstances of enslavement. One reason for this is that authors often address their own ethical concerns through the plight of their slave characters in complex and interesting ways. Through the study of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature dealing with slavery, readers and critics can explore how historical context and evolving American values shape what audiences and authors expect of slaves in literature.

Examining these novels through the lens of reader-response theory makes clear the extent to which writer and reader interact when grappling with complex questions of morality in a context as fraught with contradictions and inequalities as slavery. According to Jane P. Tompkins, "Reader-response critics would argue that [literature] cannot be understood apart from its results. Its 'effects,' psychological and otherwise, are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of a reader" ("An Introduction" ix). Wolfgang Iser concurs. He

views reader-response criticism as the acknowledgment of interaction between the author's text and the reader:

> [T]he literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. (50)

Iser insists that "[t]he convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader" (50). This dynamic between writer and reader is especially powerful when reading a text ethically. The ethical actions of characters, the ethical intentions of the author, and the ethical expectations of the reader converge to create a literary work that addresses contemporary ethical concerns. One motivation for selecting these three texts is that each was written in a distinct historical period in response to specific ethical issues; therefore, the expectations of contemporary readers vary significantly. Uncle Tom's Cabin was written when slavery was still in existence, Kindred was written as a response to the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and Tell Me a Tale was penned shortly after the trial of O. J. Simpson and the Rodney King trial and the ensuing Los Angeles riots.

The fact that slave literature remains popular over 150 years after the end of slavery indicates that both writers and readers experience something unique in the creation and interpretation of literature about slavery. Because it explores the interaction between reader and text, "'The Moral Law Within': The Morality of the Enslaved in Three American Novels" focuses on fictional slave literature rather than nonfiction slave narratives. Slaves who told their own stories grappled, of course, with the ethical issues of slavery. But the specific, pressing intention of rendering slavery's evils for the reader did not always leave room for ethical complexity. Ex-slaves writing their narratives did not wish to add difficulty to the already-convoluted conversations about slavery; rather, they needed to portray slavery within the binaries Friedman identifies so as to simplify the wrongs of slavery for their readers. Therefore, we must turn to fiction for "stories that cannot be fully contained within" those binaries. That is not to say that slave narratives are not helpful, however, and many aspects of my analysis are informed by narratives—especially Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself (1845)—and other non-fiction works.

As Immanuel Kant asserts in his Critical Examination of Practical Reason, "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above and the moral law within*" (260, author's emphasis). The selected novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Octavia E. Butler, and James McEachin allow us to explore the ways in which "the moral law within" has been addressed in the past, and they challenge us to continue our often and steady reflection on the ethical decisions we continue to make on a daily basis.

CHAPTER I

"SO VERY SIMPLE A POINT OF MORALITY AS THIS": THE ETHICS OF BENEVOLENT IMAGINING IN HARRIET BEECHER STOWE'S UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

In a February 1, 1851, letter to her brother Henry, Harriet Beecher Stowe expressed her indignation at the Fugitive Slave Act, passed only months before in September 1850:

> You don't know how my heart burns within me at the blindness and obtuseness of good people on so very simple a point of morality as this. [. . .] Must we forever keep calm and smile when every sentiment of manliness and humanity is kicked and rolled in the dust and lies trampled and bleeding and make it a merit to be exceedingly cool—I feel as if my heart would burn itself out in grief and shame [. . .]. (qtd. in Hedrick 204-05)

Stowe's horror over the Fugitive Slave Act, coupled with the urging of her sister-in-law Isabella, prompted the writing of her first novel and most famous work, Uncle Tom's Cabin. The novel, published serially in the National Era from June 5, 1851, through April 1, 1852, before being reprinted as a novel in 1852, is arguably the most influential work of slave literature in American history. Despite her limited firsthand experience of slavery, the secondhand accounts of plantation life that she received from her cook, Eliza Buck, shocked Stowe (Hedrick 219), who fervently believed that slavery was unjust and had no place in a country that lauded all men as being equal. Stowe felt the horrors of slavery personally, and imagined that those "blind" and "obtuse" citizens who failed to speak out against slavery

could be swayed to see slavery as "so very simple a point of morality" if she painted for them "in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible Slavery, its reverses, changes, and the negro character" (qtd. in Hedrick 208).

In Uncle Tom's Cabin, the reader follows Tom as he is sold from the Shelby plantation in Kentucky to the St. Clare estate in New Orleans, and finally to the Louisiana plantation of Simon Legree. Stowe utilizes Tom's movement through the South to demonstrate the spectrum of slaveholding behaviors. Arthur Shelby is a kind slave owner, and his wife Emily prides herself on training their slaves to be proper Christians. When Mr. Shelby is faced with financial difficulties, however, he decides to sell Tom despite his wife's pleas to find another way to pay off the debt. Augustine St. Clare, Tom's next owner, is also a generous master, but he lacks religion and is too apathetic to do what he knows to be right. His wife Marie is a sickly, selfish, and unhappy woman who treats her servants with contempt and assumes the worst of all people, black and white. When St. Clare is killed in a bar fight, Tom is again sold. His third owner, Simon Legree, is the evil of the slave system personified and takes pleasure in his power over others. Unlike Tom's previous owners, Legree is unmarried and treats one of his slaves, Cassy, as a sort of concubine. Readers soon learn that he intends to replace Cassy with the younger and more innocent Emmeline, whom he purchases at the same time as Tom.

Despite the varying levels of cruelty among her fictional slaveholders, Stowe holds them all accountable for the evils of the system. The existence of so-called "good" masters does not eradicate the need to end slavery. Stowe rails against the common nineteenth-century justification that slavery was a paternal institution that benefited "childlike" blacks who fell under the care of kind white "fathers." She also refuses to accept a passive stance

from Northerners, who often allowed themselves to feel removed from responsibility because they themselves did not own slaves. Stowe argues that slavery corrupts even good individuals, and in order for America to redeem its moral honor, slavery must be abolished throughout the nation.

Critically, much attention has been paid to literary representations of white slaveholders' immorality. Joshua D. Bellin, for example, in his 1993 essay "Up to Heaven's Gate, Down in the Earth's Dust: The Politics of Judgment in Uncle Tom's Cabin," views the novel as a response to the Fugitive Slave Law and the ways in which this law challenged the morality of white Northerners: "[I]naction on the one hand—failure to report a fugitive—became, in the eyes of the law, a crime against one's country; while inaction on the other—failure to protect a fugitive—became, in the eyes of God, a sin against one's fellow and one's conscience," he writes. "Though resistance may have seemed un-Christian, nonresistance began to seem the same" (279). Jane P. Tompkins, too, notes in "Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Politics of Literary History" that Stowe was more interested in changing her readers' hearts than the country's laws. Stowe wanted to abolish slavery, of course, but she recognized that merely changing the law would not erase "the moral conditions that produced slavery in the first place" (511). Obviously, the moral conscience of white Northerners played a major role in determining the future of slavery, and so it is right that much attention has been paid to the ways in which Stowe attempts in her novel to address the moral conscience of her white readers. Considerably less critical attention has been paid, however, to the significant focus Uncle Tom's Cabin places on the moral makeup of slaves themselves. For Stowe, "the negro character" she hoped to paint for her readers is a key element of her argument against slavery. In a speech delivered by St. Clare, readers are

told, "It takes no spectacles to see that a great class of vicious, improvident, degraded people, among us, are an evil to us, as well as to themselves" (201-02).[1] St. Clare points out that refusing education and humane treatment to millions of slaves in the South is a detriment to the white society who keeps these slaves in their homes and in contact with their children; at the same time, St. Clare insists slavery posed a moral dilemma not only to the society in which it existed, but to the enslaved as well. A provocative and easily overlooked element of Uncle Tom's Cabin is that, rather than placing a sole focus on the immorality of free white slaveholders, Stowe grants her enslaved black characters moral judgment. Her black characters, especially Tom, are forced to struggle on a regular basis with the moral uncertainties created by the system of slavery.

To Stowe, slavery encompassed "so very simple a point of morality," but her readers did not necessarily view slavery with such clarity. Contemporary readers of Uncle Tom's Cabin saw in Tom's plight their own moral predicament with slavery, which is perhaps why the novel was so powerful. Whether a reader was an abolitionist or a supporter of the institution, the ethical questions raised were serious, and the ultimate question was one that challenged the entire nation: to what extent should one go to end (or maintain) slavery? Stowe is unique in her approach to answering this question in that she explores the ethics of slavery from within the system—through the experiences of slaves themselves—rather than focusing only on the ways that slaveholding undermines the morality of those who own slaves.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all references to Uncle Tom's Cabin refer to the Norton Critical edition of the text edited by Elizabeth Ammons.

Since the 1985 publication of Tompkins's Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860, most scholars and critics have situated Uncle Tom's Cabin within the realm of sentimental literature. Prior to Tompkins's work, sentimental fiction was dismissed as "popular" reading, worthy neither of critical attention nor canonization. In fact, it is the success of the novel's sentiment, as Tompkins asserts, that gives the novel its power. Tompkins recognizes, "It is because Stowe is able to combine so many of the culture's central concerns in a narrative that is immediately accessible to the general population that she is able to move so many people so deeply" ("Sentimental" 513). Tompkins focuses on Stowe's use of sympathy to create a fictional world where her free white readers can see past color lines to sympathize with her enslaved black characters. Marianne Noble, however, argues that Stowe does more than push readers to sympathize with slaves. In "The Ecstasies of Sentimental Wounding," Noble argues that Stowe attempts to undermine the abstraction of slavery, which is what made it acceptable to so many whites in the first place, by forcing readers to identify with black characters on an emotional, even physical, level. Stowe does this, according to Noble, by focusing on emotions and physical sensations that white readers could tap into and, she believed, through which they could understand the slave experience (295). For example, Stowe gives great attention to Tom being separated from his wife and children, detailing how the children clung to Chloe and sobbed as their father was taken away (85). Likewise, Eliza asks Mrs. Bird if she has ever lost a child and compares her son being sold to his dying (72). That Eliza makes this comparison is not a coincidence. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the average white American woman gave birth to six or seven children; one or two of those children would typically die before the age of one (Haines 104). Stowe was writing as a mother who had recently lost her young son Charley to

the cholera epidemic of 1849 (Hedrick 190-91), and she knew that many of her readers also would have lost children. Stowe's narrator even directly addresses readers who have suffered such a loss: "And oh! mother that reads this, has there never been in your house a drawer, or a closet, the opening of which has been to you like the opening of a little grave? Ah! happy mother that you are, if it has not been so" (75). Stowe is playing on her readers' emotions, hoping that if they can relate to losing a family member that they will then be able to identify with the emotional and even physical anguish of slavery. Stowe relies on what Noble terms "sentimental wounding" as a method of "enabling readers to understand a slave's physical anguish intuitively rather than abstractly" (Noble 303).

Uncle Tom does suffer physical anguish in the novel, but unlike Madison Washington, the title character in Frederick Douglass's story "The Heroic Slave," Tom is not a physical hero. While Madison is considered brave because of his physical courage—he first escapes from slavery himself, then returns to try to rescue his wife, and finally leads a revolt aboard a slaving vessel—Tom, although physically strong, never uses his bodily stature to challenge slavery. Culturally speaking, it is Tom's perceived lack of courage that has often resulted in criticism of the novel. Even Douglass, a staunch supporter of Stowe and her novel, published in his paper a letter by William G. Allen criticizing Tom's lack of physical resistance (Levine 527). Likewise, one of several letters written by Martin Delany published in Frederick Douglass' Paper presented his concern with African Americans' "tendencies to depend on whites for their elevation" (Levine 533). Praise for Stowe's novel by black abolitionists was just another example, Delany maintained, of that reliance. Allen's and Delany's criticisms carried over to the twentieth century, when the phrase "Uncle Tom" came to represent "a Black person who is humiliatingly subservient or deferential to White

people" (Pilgrim). Focusing on Tom's physical courage is therefore disappointing and, more importantly, misses the point.

This ethical realm of Uncle Tom's Cabin is central to understanding the power the novel exerted over its contemporary readers. By forcing readers to confront the ethical demands that face Tom, Stowe creates in her readers an experience of ethical anguish. Especially powerful in the novel is that Stowe not only "wounds" readers emotionally and physically but *ethically* as well. As Gregg D. Crane states it, "[T]he persistence of the law of slavery and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 raised doubts as to whether American law was based on moral principle or the self-interest of the politically and economically powerful." More importantly, he continues, slavery posed the question, "What should an American do when confronted with a disturbing and extreme incongruity between morality and law?" (176-77). For Stowe, the answer to any question that juxtaposed the law of man with the law of God was obvious, but it was not so clear to all Northerners. The novel, then, paints the picture of "so very simple a point of morality as this" so that her contemporary readers can see with clarity the moral responsibility of Americans on the issue of slavery.

The real power of Stowe's novel lies within this realm of ethical anguish. In contrast to the character of Madison Washington, and even to the authors Stowe and Douglass, Tom is not concerned with abolition, but with faith. His goal is to lead a moral life, and so while Tom does suffer physically in the novel, it is slavery's imposed ethical anguish that most troubles him. Stowe creates a parallel between the situations with which her characters must deal and the ethical demands placed on her readers; moreover, her characters act in ways her readers imagine they would act in similar situations. The result is that Stowe creates a shared

sense of ethical responsibility between her free white readers and enslaved black characters. Through the moral decisions Tom makes, readers learn how to confront slavery at its most basic level. Readers soon realize that indifference to slavery, or even quietly abhorring it, will not bring about the necessary change. Read in this light, Uncle Tom's Cabin serves as a guidebook for moral behavior, illustrating for readers the means by which Stowe believes slavery will be abolished. Ultimately, in the character of Tom, Stowe creates a moral role model and a vehicle for readers to imagine themselves the hero while navigating the ethically exigent terrain of slavery.

This reading of Uncle Tom's Cabin is contrary to that of critics like Jean Fagan Yellin, who reads the novel as an examination of "the moral dilemma of *white* Americans who must decide how to act in the face of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law." Yellin explains that Stowe's white characters must decide "whether to obey the law and apprehend escaped slaves or to act on their feelings of charity, help the fugitives, and break the law. Repeatedly, the free white individuals faced with these moral dilemmas [in the novel] are women" ("Doing" 85, author's emphasis). Yellin argues that "perhaps Mary Bird is the most important model for Stowe's readers among women of 'the nominally free states' whose involvement with slaves and slavery was less intimate" ("Doing" 98). Although Yellin's reading, like mine, places the ultimate emphasis on white readers of the novel, she accomplishes this through her interpretation of free white characters, while I argue that Stowe puts the slave at the moral center of Uncle Tom's Cabin, rendering the white slaveholding characters ultimately irrelevant. Such an exploration conveys Stowe's desire to embody her slave characters as more fully human than they had been previously depicted. The moral decisions her slaves make also reveal what Stowe's contemporary audience—and

perhaps even Stowe herself—could expect and allow from a slave. What has been underappreciated about the novel is that it explores slavery from within the system, through the experiences of one enslaved. The moral judgment of white readers may determine the future of slavery in the United States, but a more immediate concern addressed by the novel is that slavery has moral implications for those enslaved. Stowe's enslaved characters react to their enslavement the way white readers imagine they themselves would act. By relying on the ethics of benevolence that was common at the time, Stowe creates in Uncle Tom's Cabin a vehicle for readers to benevolently imagine themselves in the role of enslaved characters. It is, therefore, ultimately the morality of the enslaved that moves readers to abhor slavery.

Stowe opens her novel by highlighting the sharp contrast between Haley, a white slave trader, and the slaveholding "gentleman" Mr. Shelby. In opposition to the refined Shelby, Haley:

> was a short, thick-set man, with coarse, commonplace features, and that swaggering air of pretension which marks a low man who is trying to elbow his way upward in the world. He was much over-dressed, in a gaudy vest of many colors, a blue neckerchief, bedropped gayly with yellow spots, and arranged with a flaunting tie, quite in keeping with the general air of the man. [. . .] His conversation was in free and easy defiance of Murray's Grammar, and was garnished at convenient intervals with various profane expressions, which not even the desire to be graphic in our account shall induce us to transcribe. (1)

To her readers' horror, Stowe portrays a world in which slavery forces together the high and low of white society, a world in which even distinguished whites cannot escape the baseness of slavery as it sits, personified, in their parlors. Stowe is unwilling to allow class or education to veil the moral degradation of participating in the institution. In this refusal to relegate Shelby as "good" and Haley as "evil," Stowe avoids the binaries of which Susan Stanford Friedman warns. She does not retreat from the moral complexities that arise when characters "cannot be fully contained within" an archetype. Although Shelby is portrayed more sympathetically, Stowe holds him as accountable as Haley for the evils of slavery.

The real contrast Stowe exposes, then, is not between these two immoral white men, but between Haley and Uncle Tom. Stowe makes this contrast apparent when, only two short chapters later, the reader gets a much more amicable description of Tom:

> At this table was seated Uncle Tom, Mr. Shelby's best hand, who, as he is to be the hero of our story, we must daguerreotype for our readers. He was a large, broad-chested, powerfully-made man, of a full glossy black, and a face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindliness and benevolence. There was something about his whole air self-respecting and dignified, yet united with a confiding and humble simplicity.
>
> He was very busily intent at this moment on a slate lying before him, on which he was carefully and slowly endeavoring to accomplish a copy of some letters [. . .]. (18)

The contrast Stowe sets up is explicit. Tom is "the hero," while Haley does not even "come under the species" of "gentlemen" (1). Tom is "large, broad-chested, powerfully-made,"

while Haley is "short, thick-set" and "commonplace." Tom works diligently to learn to write properly, while Haley's speech is an assault on proper English.

Here, Stowe does create a binary between Tom and Haley, but she does so in order to allow readers to align themselves with her enslaved hero. Stowe creates in Tom a black character with whom white readers would rather relate than with his white antagonist, the slave trader Haley. Tom explicitly defines this distinction when he exclaims to his wife Chloe, "I'm sure I'd rather be sold, ten thousand times over, than to have all that ar poor crittur's got to answer for" (48). Tom recognizes and notes for readers that he is a better man than Haley and that he would rather be sold away from his family than stoop to Haley's level of moral deficiency. Significantly, the portrayal of a black man who is ethically superior to a white man creates in Tom not a slave to pity, but a man to emulate.

Stowe further demonstrates Tom's moral superiority when she immediately puts him to the test in complex ethical situations. When he finds out he is about to be sold away from the Shelby plantation, Tom accepts his fate, thankful that his wife and children are not to be sold. Fellow slave Eliza urges Tom to run away with her and her son Harry, who has also been selected for sale, but Tom refuses, claiming that it would not be the right thing for him to do. Tom explains, "Mas'r always found me on the spot—he always will. I never have broke trust, nor used my pass no ways contrary to my word, and I never will" (34). Stowe tells us that Tom "was rather proud of his honesty" (102), and he is presumably more honest than his owner Mr. Shelby, who has "promised [Tom] his freedom" but sells him nevertheless (28). Because he refuses to go against his word, Tom is again morally superior to a white man—this time Mr. Shelby.

Tom does not consider that his honesty in this matter will not really help his family and friends. The nature of slavery dictates that, eventually, Mr. Shelby's slaves will be sold anyway. Mr. Shelby will accumulate new debts or will eventually die, perhaps resulting in the selling of his slaves as part of the estate. Tom's actions may delay the suffering of his fellow slaves, but he cannot ultimately prevent it. Additionally, Eliza's son Harry is an explicit part of Shelby's deal with Haley; therefore, Eliza's escape with Harry means Shelby's debt will not be paid in its entirety. Tom encourages Eliza to leave regardless, saying, "Let Eliza go—it's her right! I wouldn't be the one to say no—'t 'an't in *natur* for her to stay" (34, author's emphasis). It is not escape that he believes is wrong, or he would not condone Eliza's actions. But it also cannot be for the good of his fellow slaves that he refuses to run, or he would urge Eliza to sacrifice Harry to protect the others.

For Tom, the central issue is one of personal integrity. He has given his word, and he refuses to betray that promise, even for the sake of his freedom. Former real-life slave Josiah Henson, on whom the character of Tom is purportedly based, recounts a similar situation in his 1849 autobiography. He recalls taking his master's slaves through Ohio and ignoring the free blacks who urged him to stay in Cincinnati rather than continue on to Kentucky. Like Tom, Henson could not bring himself to break his word, although he knew his master would not extend him the same consideration:

> I might liberate my family, my companions, and myself, without the smallest risk, and without injustice to any individual, except one whom we had none of us any reason to love, who had been guilty of cruelty and oppression to us all for many years, and who had never shown the smallest symptom of sympathy with us, or with any one in our condition. [. . .] [But] I had

> promised that man to take his property to Kentucky, and deposit it with his brother; and this, and this only, I resolved to do. (402)

Tom's integrity is significant because it explicitly confronts the contemporary belief that blacks could be universally categorized as a stereotypical character such as Sambo. In his book The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South, John W. Blassingame discusses the typical slave stereotypes popular in antebellum literature. The Sambo character, which Tom has come to be associated with, was a slave who was loyal to his white master and who was defined as being "humorous," "superstitious," and "musical" (134). The Sambo stereotype is now understood not as an actual slave "type," but as a persona that slaves would often adopt as a means of "shap[ing] their behavior [. . .] to the white man's moods" (Blassingame 200). Stowe interestingly engages the Sambo stereotype in the character of Tom, but Tom does not wholly embody the Sambo image. Although he is loyal to his respective owners, he is not humorous, superstitious, or musically inclined as is the Sambo figure. Once again, Stowe escapes reliance on binaries by allowing Tom a unique identity rather than defining him as a stock figure with which her readers were familiar and had already learned to dismiss. The Sambo figure was never imbued with conscience or moral reasoning, and so Tom, when read as an ethical figure, escapes such classification.

Key in Stowe's description of Tom is that his "truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindliness and *benevolence*" (18, emphasis added). Tom's benevolence is yet another way for nineteenth-century readers to see past color lines and identify with him. In The Journal of Negro History, literary scholar Wylie Sypher stresses that benevolence was more than just a popular term. He explains that benevolence actually became an ethical model in the 1830s, when

"'classical' ethics, based on rational discipline" was replaced "by the 'romantic' or humanitarian ethics, based on benevolism" (263). Sypher further argues that "the point at which this change in ethics occurred is the moment in which the institution of Negro slavery was attacked by benevolistic theory," namely in Francis Hutcheson's posthumous 1755 text System of Moral Philosophy (263). David Brion Davis summarizes Hutcheson's theory:

> The internal moral sense perceives virtues as the eye perceives light, and after first giving approval to our own benevolent passions, it teaches us to approve the actions of others which stem from similar motives. Our delight in benevolence is an instinctive reflex; it is not dependent on reason or an anticipation of pleasure. And yet we have been so artfully contrived by our Creator that our subjective feelings correspond perfectly with an external and general good. (375-76)

Hutcheson believed all people—including those who were enslaved—possessed this "internal moral sense." Unlike other writers, who focused only on the morality—or immorality—of white slaveholders, Stowe gives Tom this intrinsic morality on which he bases his benevolent actions.

This new form of benevolent ethics was important for Stowe to employ as benevolence was a highly regarded trait among white middle class readers. In her essay "Charity Begins at Home: Stowe's Antislavery Novels and the Forms of Benevolent Citizenship," Susan M. Ryan describes both the popularity of the word benevolence and the common antebellum belief that the United States was "legitimized through the benevolence of its policies" (752). She notes that "before the Civil War, Americans used the terms *benevolence* and *benevolent* with astonishing frequency, not only where one would expect, as in

reports by charitable organizations and in sermons or religious tracts, but also in political pamphlets, newspaper articles, poetry, and fiction" (752, author's emphasis). Benevolence was esteemed not only in the public sphere, however; it was also regarded as a desired personality trait in women of the time. The ideal of benevolence was central to the idea of the "proper woman," as can be seen in the 1833 text Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character:

> Nothing surely can tend to infuse genuine humility so much as a discovery of the secret workings of the human heart, and a compassion of its innate and acquired evil with the perfect purity of the law of God. [. . .] The spirit that has animated for a while the tabernacle of clay, —that has prompted to *benevolence*, —that has stimulated to self-denial, —that has striven, and struggled, and suffered under its load of flesh, —then breaks from its prison and finds its repose. (Sandford 61, 223, emphasis added)

White women in antebellum America were trained to be, and in fact found their identities in being, benevolent. Ryan posits, "Benevolence offered them a means of participating in civic life without challenging the era's strictures against their more overt involvement in the political sphere (by voting, holding office, or speaking in public to mixed audiences). For these women, benevolent activism was the very substance of their citizenship" (Grammar 7). Ryan maintains that "neither Stowe's literary representations nor her politics can be well understood apart from the antebellum discourse of benevolence within which she wrote her antislavery novels and in whose construction she participated" ("Charity" 752).

Understanding the cultural significance of benevolence allows modern readers to see the transformative power that Tom's benevolence has throughout the novel. Although Stowe

also describes Tom as a Christian figure, explicitly referring to him as a man who is "a sort of patriarch in religious matters" (26) and as "a Christian teacher" (84) with "a natural genius for religion" (160), it is Tom's benevolence that positions him as a model of antebellum citizenship if considered within the culture of benevolence as Ryan identifies it. While his personal integrity keeps Tom from running, his benevolent nature requires that he help Eliza escape.

Hutcheson's theory of moral benevolence, as Davis describes it, suggests that the internal moral sense "teaches us to approve the actions of others which stem from similar [benevolent] motives." The result of this is that readers not only condone Eliza's escape, but also appreciate the benevolence from which Tom acts when he allows her to flee. Nineteenth-century readers, culturally "trained" in the ethics of benevolence, imagine they, too, would choose the benevolent course. Stowe creates what Catherine Belsey refers to in Critical Practice as a "position of intelligibility" from which to view the scene of Eliza's escape, giving the reader only one point of view from which to interpret it, essentially "installing him or her in a single position from which the scene is intelligible" (70). In the case of Eliza's escape, benevolent readers picture themselves helping the frantic mother with whom they can so closely relate. This pushes readers beyond a mere sympathetic understanding into a sphere of imagining themselves as helpers of Eliza and her child—as, in fact, abolitionists. By not only putting Tom into ethical situations with which her readers can relate but also by having him respond benevolently in those situations, Stowe creates a literary world in which her white readers do not just identify with enslaved characters but can picture themselves working against slavery in the name of benevolence. The character of Tom and the identity of the reader conflate to produce a "reader-as-hero" identity working

within the novel. Significantly, Stowe does not simply create readers' sympathy with Tom as an object, as someone for whom they feel sorry but do not necessarily view as human; rather, Stowe focuses on Tom's moral actions, identifying him as a thinking subject capable of moral reasoning.

Psychologist Richard J. Gerrig details the effect of reading on the reader in his book Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading. Gerrig describes six elements "of a literal experience of being transported." The first of these elements is that "[s]omeone ('the traveler') is transported" (10). Here the reader becomes a citizen of the fictional world in which he or she is immersed, essentially following the adage "When in Rome." Gerrig states that "we are admonished to refit ourselves for local customs. Certainly if we plan to travel in good faith, we must be sure we are willing to behave as Romans do for the duration of the trip" (11). According to Gerrig's theory, in order to enter Tom's world, white readers must be willing to live as Tom lives, that is, as a slave. By skillfully placing Tom at the moral center of her novel, Stowe prevents readers from ethically aligning themselves with the white middle class characters with whom they would choose to relate. The reader is immersed in a world where he or she views life through the eyes of one who is held and traded as property, and therefore reacts to situations as one who is enslaved would react. Although Stowe represents a variety of white slaveholders and abolitionists in the text with whom readers can sometimes identify, Tom most consistently shapes the reader's ethical world. Through the contrast of Tom with low whites like Haley, Stowe creates a literary environment in which readers, too, would rather be enslaved and sold away from their families—at least within the fictional world of the novel—than be affiliated with a man of such low character as the slave trader.

Another element of literary transportation, according to Gerrig, is that "[s]ome aspects of the world of origin become inaccessible" (14), or unintelligible, to use Belsey's term. This, Gerrig explains, means "that immersion in narratives brings about partial isolation from the facts of the real world" (16). In the case of Uncle Tom's Cabin, an upstanding citizen, upon being immersed in the scene of Eliza's frantic flight, might disregard his obligation under the Fugitive Slave Act to turn in runaway slaves. Instead, he becomes immersed in Eliza's terror as she and Harry escape from slave traders by crossing the treacherous Ohio River:

> In that dizzy moment her feet to her scarce seemed to touch the ground, and a moment brought her to the water's edge. Right on behind her they came; and, nerved with strength such as God gives only to the desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted sheer over the turbid current by the shore, on to the raft of ice beyond. It was a desperate leap—impossible to anything but madness and despair [. . .]. (52)

While immersed in the narrative, the reader can imagine himself offering his hand to help Eliza escape. Likewise, a middle class white woman who, in real life, was perhaps indifferent to slavery could suddenly imagine herself, in the world of Uncle Tom, as a slave suffering the injustices of the system, and therefore having very strong feelings against slavery. It would not matter to the reader, for example, that, as a white woman, she need not worry about her children being taken from her. As she reads how illiterate Tom struggles to write to his family back on the Shelby plantation, she imagines herself in Tom's place, desperately missing a family to whom she cannot even write a letter. Tom explains to St. Clare's daughter, "I'm trying to write to my poor old woman, Miss Eva, and my little chil'en, [. . .]

but, some how, I'm feard I shan't make it out" (205), and the reader's position of intelligibility would be such that her real-life circumstances would not affect her ability to imagine herself the one enslaved. In essence, indifference itself becomes inaccessible and unintelligible, and the reader-as-hero must recognize Tom's ethical dilemmas as her own moral concerns.

Because she cannot distance herself from slavery as she does in the real world, the reader is forced to grapple within Tom's realm of ethical anguish, and the only reprieve from this ethical anguish comes from the reader-as-hero making morally correct choices. While readers become ensconced in the ethical anguish of the novel by fulfilling the role of reader-as-hero, Stowe concurrently begins her specific moral instruction for readers. She focuses on three methods of working towards abolition: training children to reject slavery, converting individuals to Christianity, and confronting supporters of the institution. Tom models one method at each of the three plantations where he is enslaved.

At the Shelby plantation, Tom focuses on the need to train children to reject slavery. As Tom is hauled off by Haley, George, the young son of Mr. Shelby, rides up to the wagon that is taking Tom to the slave market. Tom has been a trusted friend and confidant to George his whole life, and as they say goodbye, Tom reminds George to treat his parents well and to be a good Christian. Like Tom, the reader-as-hero wants George to grow up to be a respectable young man who will not have to deal with the problems imposed by slavery. Tom confesses that he "sees all that's bound up" in George (87), which is the potential end of slavery on the Shelby plantation. George proudly scolds Haley: "I should think you'd be ashamed to spend all your life buying men and women, and chaining them, like cattle!" Haley retorts, "'tan't any meaner sellin' on 'em, than 't is buyin'!" and reminds both George

and readers that the "gentleman" Mr. Shelby is just as responsible for slavery as slave traders like Haley. George declares, "I'll never do either, when I'm a man!" (88). In George, both Tom and readers see the potential of a young man who refuses to grow up to be a slave owner. The character of George is significant in that he, too, is aware of the ethical anguish of slavery. Having benefited from Tom's moral guidance his entire life, George demonstrates the behavior that will ultimately be required if slavery is to end: he rebels against his cultural and familial values when he boldly vows not to become like his father.

In Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself, Douglass recalls making a similar impression on the white children with whom he interacted as a child. Douglass recalls that he "converted into teachers" the white boys in the neighborhood so they would teach him to read. Douglass also became their teacher, however, schooling these boys on the injustice of slavery. He would plead with them, "Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?" and "they would express [. . .] the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free" (60). Just as Douglass elicits the sympathy of his white playmates, Tom succeeds in training George to reject slavery. More powerful, however, is that Tom also succeeds in fashioning George into a teacher of the young readers of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Like Douglass in his interaction with white children, George models for young readers the necessity of casting off their parents' acceptance of slavery and refusing to participate in its evils. For contemporary parents reading the serialized version of Uncle Tom's Cabin to their children each week, Stowe's point is apt: if children are not raised properly, they may rebel, as George Shelby does. One of the biggest fears of slaveholders was not only that their slaves would rebel but also that there might be whites in their community willing to help slaves revolt.

Stowe knowingly plays on this fear as George denounces his father's history as a slave owner and, later in the narrative, frees his family's slaves. The novel, then, urges parents to train their children to follow moral law, so they do not need to rebel against their families and their country when they grow up and recognize the immorality of slaveholding. Stowe accomplishes something extraordinary here, as she grounds moral virtue in the experience of the slave and places Tom at the moral center of her novel. It is not the free whites who are doing the "paternalistic" duty of caring for the souls of their black "children." Rather, it is an enslaved black who teaches other characters in the text, in addition to teaching the readers of the text.

Stowe knew that children must reject the institution of slavery in order for abolition to be successful. She herself addressed her young readers directly in the "Concluding Remarks" of the serialized version of the novel. As she speaks to "the dear little children who have followed her story," Stowe indirectly addresses the parents reading this appeal to their children and issues yet another warning that it is in parents' best interest to raise their children to be morally opposed to slavery, or they run the risk of their children someday rejecting them and their values. She writes:

> Dear children, you will one day be men and women; and [I hope] that you will learn from this story always to remember and pity the poor and oppressed, and, when you grow up, show your pity by doing all you can for them. Never, if you can help it, let a colored child be shut out of school, or treated with neglect and contempt, because of his color. Remember the sweet example of little Eva, and try to feel the same regard for all that she did; and then, when you grow up, we hope that the foolish and unchristian prejudice

> against people, merely on account of their complexion, will be done away with.

Here, Stowe focuses on Eva as the moral example for young readers, and literary critics have followed her lead. Although St. Clare's daughter, in all her goodness, may seem the more obvious role model for young readers, she does not effect any change towards abolition; ultimately, she does not even sway her father, who fails to free Tom as he promised her.

Tom is the true moral example and agent of change in the novel as he works toward ending slavery through his relationship with young George. All George has learned from Tom becomes manifest when, after his father has passed away, he appears at the Legree plantation to honor the Shelbys' promise to return Tom to his family. Although he is too late to save Tom, George stays true to everything he has learned from his friend and returns home to free the remainder of his father's slaves. "To the surprise of all," Stowe tells readers, "he appeared among them with a bundle of papers in his hand, containing a certificate of freedom to every one on the place, which he read successively, and presented, amid the sobs and tears and shouts of all present" (379). It is obvious that training children in the horrors of slavery is a vital step toward abolition. As readers identify with Tom and imagine themselves the benevolent hero, they too can see the value of encouraging George and, by extension, all children to want a world without slaves.

When Tom encounters Eva St. Clare, readers quickly realize that this little girl already understands the malevolence of slavery and does not need to be trained in its evils as George Shelby did. On the St. Clare plantation, therefore, Tom can concentrate on redeeming Eva's father by modeling Stowe's second abolitionist behavior: converting individuals to Christianity. Thomas P. Joswick argues that it is conversion that will end slavery: "In Uncle

Tom's Cabin, then, character is the foundation of all social forms, and so that slavery will be abolished the novel urges a change of character by embracing a motive higher than obedience to existing laws" (271). Stowe believed in the power of Christianity to change people. Prior to writing Uncle Tom's Cabin, she published a number of articles in the New-York Evangelist urging Christian readers to re-examine their faith. She advises readers of her 1845 article "Lord, If Thou Hadst Been There!," to "read the life of Jesus with attention—study it—inquire earnestly with yourself, 'What sort of a person, in thought, in feeling, in action, was my Savior?'—live in constant sympathy and communion with him—and there will be within a kind of instinctive rule by which to try all things" (qtd. in Hedrick 157). Six years later, Stowe fashioned the character of Uncle Tom to embody these words, and Tom sees it as his responsibility to share his Christian faith with others. Through the character of St. Clare, Stowe demonstrates to readers the hypocrisy that results from not acting according to what one knows to be right. St. Clare is a man who understands the baseness of slavery, but he lacks the tenacity to act on his beliefs.

Once Tom arrives in the St. Clare household, he recognizes that "Mas'r wasn't a Christian" (177) and tries to convince St. Clare to protect his soul. St. Clare asserts, "Tom, I don't believe, —I can't believe, —I've got the habit of doubting [. . .]. I want to believe this Bible, —and I can't" (262). But Tom pleads with St. Clare to rely on God:

> "O, Mas'r, when I was sold away from my old woman and the children, I was jest a most broke up. I felt as if there warn't nothin' left; and then the good Lord, he stood by me and he says, 'Fear not, Tom;' and he brings light and joy into a poor feller's soul, —makes all peace; and I's so happy, and loves everybody, and feels willin' jest to be the Lord's, and have the Lord's will

> done, and be put jest where the Lord wants to put me. I know it couldn't come from me, cause I's a poor, complainin' cretur; it comes from the Lord; and I know He's willin' to do for Mas'r." (262)

In her portrayal of Tom, Stowe pushes her readers not only to maintain their own faith, but also to share their faith with nonbelievers in the hope that, through Christianity, a respect for all life will emerge. If Stowe can convince her reader-as-hero to share Christianity with those who lack faith, then perhaps those converted will begin to see the human worth of those enslaved. Stowe urges her readers to follow the moral example set by Tom in his interactions with St. Clare. Just as the reader-as-hero could imagine acting the part of an abolitionist to help Eliza escape, the reader-as-hero now sees that converting St. Clare to Christianity is the only hope for his slaves.

Female readers especially imagine their benevolent sympathies extending to St. Clare in an effort to Christianize him. The reader-as-hero sees herself pleading with St. Clare to forgo his cavalier lifestyle, and when Eva passes away, the reader-as-hero can picture herself as the rock on which St. Clare leans for support. St. Clare's wife Marie, bedridden and hostile, is neither physically nor emotionally capable of supporting her husband as he grapples both with the ethical questions of slavery and the death of his beloved daughter; this role can only be fulfilled by Tom and the reader-as-hero. The reader imagines Eva's sickroom, where Eva "lay like a wearied dove in her father's arms" while "Marie rose and threw herself out of the apartment into her own, when she fell into violent hysterics" (253). After Eva's passing, it is Tom who provides St. Clare with comfort:

> Tom [. . .] had a feeling at his own heart, that drew him to his master. He followed him wherever he walked, wistfully and sadly; and when he saw him

> sitting, so pale and quiet, in Eva's room, holding before his eyes her little open Bible, through seeing no letter or word of what was in it, there was more sorrow to Tom in that still, fixed, tearless eye, than in all Marie's moans and lamentations. (260)

The reader-as-hero imagines herself in Tom's place, silently supporting St. Clare in his grief.

Stowe pushes readers to recognize that conversion to Christianity is an important step toward abolition, but she also wants readers to recognize the urgency with which they must act. Eva recognizes this urgency within the microcosm of her own small world. She asks her father to free Tom when she is gone, because she worries that a worse fate should await St. Clare's slaves if anything should happen to him. She tells him, "O, but, papa, if anything should happen to you, what would become of them? There are very few men like you papa" (241). Even Ophelia asks St. Clare, "[H]ave you ever made any provision for your servants, in case of your death." He responds, "Well, I mean to make a provision, by and by. [. . .] O, one of these days." "What if you should die first?" Ophelia asks. (269). Later, St Clare tells Ophelia he is ready to act. When she asks what he is going to do, he responds, "My duty, I hope, to the poor and lowly, as fast as I find it out [. . .] beginning with my own servants, for whom I have yet done nothing" (272). Although St. Clare has promised Eva that he will free Tom, and he has told Ophelia that he plans to do, St. Clare dies before he acts on his intentions. He is fatally stabbed in the process of trying to stop a bar fight. Stowe makes it glaringly obvious to readers that good intentions are not enough; immediate action is required to redeem America's moral worth. Tom has succeeded in converting St. Clare to Christianity, but it is not soon enough for Tom and St. Clare's other servants to benefit from St. Clare's conversion.

On the Legree plantation, Stowe makes it clear that training children in benevolence and converting supporters of slavery to Christianity is not enough. Legree is not a man who, like St. Clare, understands the intrinsic evil of slavery. Stowe describes Legree as having a "round, bullet head" and a "large, coarse mouth [which] was distended with tobacco, the juice of which, from time to time, he ejected from him with great decision and explosive force" (289). When Tom first sets eyes on Legree, Stowe tells readers that "he felt an immediate and revolting horror at him, that increased as he came near" (289). Stowe recognizes that Tom cannot convert a man like Legree to Christianity or convince him to free his slaves. But Legree, like Shelby and St. Clare, is ultimately irrelevant to a moral reading of the novel. What matters is Tom's response to his spiteful master. Stowe repeatedly tests both Tom's and the reader-as-hero's moral makeup by putting Tom into increasingly anguishing situations. When Legree, who has chosen Tom to become an overseer on his plantation, attempts to "harden him" by forcing him to whip Lucy (304), Tom refuses, even when threatened with physical harm. Tom claims, "[T]his yer thing I can't feel it right to do; —and, Mas'r, I *never* shall do it, —*never*!" (308, author's emphasis). Such belligerence only infuriates Legree, and Tom receives his first beating at the hands of Sambo and Quimbo, Legree's brutal black drivers. Even after being beaten, Tom does not back down. When Legree confronts Tom the next day, Tom maintains that he "never will do a cruel thing, come what may" (329). In the midst of his suffering on the Legree plantation, Tom maintains his Christian beliefs, his honesty, and his benevolent nature, even praying for the man who inflicts harm on him. The scene's position of intelligibility is such that the reader-as-hero continues to align herself with Tom. The reader-as-hero suffers Tom's ethical anguish and simultaneously understands the necessity of standing up to Legree.

Tom takes his most powerful stand against slavery when he advises Cassy to run away with Emmeline. Although Tom is unwilling to kill Legree, he does not believe Cassy and Emmeline should continue to suffer the disgrace to which Legree subjects them. When Legree realizes that the women have escaped, Stowe tests Tom's faith even further by forcing him to choose between saving his own life and protecting the escaped women. Again, Tom bases his decision on his Christian faith. Yellin explains, "His assertion that he belongs body and soul not to Masr, but to Jesus, constitutes his rebellion" (Intricate 134). Although he knows their hiding place, Tom responds to Legree's threats, "*I han't got nothing to tell, Mas'r*" (358, author's emphasis). Tom refuses to tell Legree where Cassy and Emmeline have escaped to, because he answers only to God. Stowe yet again creates benevolent imagining within the reader. Readers align themselves with Tom and imagine themselves as the protectors of feminine virtue against the vile and brutal Simon Legree. Cassy and Emmeline's escape ultimately costs Tom his life; he refuses to tell Legree where they have gone, and as a result, is beaten until even the apparently relentless Sambo and Quimbo recognize his faithfulness and beg him, "O, Tom! do tell us who is *Jesus*, anyhow" (359, author's emphasis). Even as he lies dying, Tom continues to work toward abolition by converting to Christianity the slave drivers who aided Legree in perpetuating the horrors of slavery.

Although Stowe asserts that Tom must stand up to those like Legree who perpetrate the injustices of slavery, Tom never reacts with violence. When Tom is given a chance to kill Legree, he adheres to his Christian principles. Cassy has already set the stage for murder by putting a sleeping powder into Legree's brandy. She approaches Tom for help in the killing because she is too weak to use the ax against Legree herself. But Tom refuses this chance at

liberty by way of immorality, firmly responding, "No! good never comes of wickedness. I'd sooner chop my right hand off!" (344). Tom's concern with ethical courage is most obvious as he passes up a chance to claim his freedom. To modern readers especially, Tom's refusal to take physical action to achieve what many see as a moral end might be frustrating. Tom seems more concerned with morality than with human beings. To one concerned with abolition, the murder of Legree can be morally justified—even deemed the right action—if Legree's death would result in his slaves securing their freedom. But to one concerned with living an ethical life and being a model of moral behavior even in slavery, as Tom is, the killing of a man, regardless of the result, is not an option. Tom does not act out of blind faith or out of a sense of duty to his white master, which is why the ethical impact of Uncle Tom's Cabin is so decisive. Tom longs for his freedom, yearns to see his wife and children again. He makes a conscious choice—an ethically anguishing choice—not to kill Legree, although it is perhaps the only way he will ever get what he truly wants. In making this monumental ethical decision, Tom secures his place as the moral center of the novel and becomes the "Christian hero" that Richard Hildreth, author of The Slave: or Memoirs of Archy Moore (1836), credits with the novel's success (qtd. in Yellin, Intricate 134). Hildreth recognizes that it is not Uncle Tom the slave but Uncle Tom the Christian man, who makes ethical decisions grounded in his spirituality, that makes Uncle Tom's Cabin such a powerful force.

By the novel's end, slavery within Tom's sphere has been abolished. George Shelby has taken over his father's plantation in Kentucky, where the former slaves are given a choice of leaving or staying on to work for wages; Cassy and Emmeline have escaped and been reunited with Cassy's family; Sambo and Quimbo have found God and will no longer

perpetuate the violence of slavery on other blacks; and Simon Legree has spiraled into despondency, unable to further torment those on his plantation. Stowe clearly illustrates to readers that confronting the ethical anguish imposed by slavery will ultimately result in abolition. And Tom, until the time of his death, succeeds in maintaining his benevolence despite the worsening conditions with which he is faced. Stowe predicts that if slavery is not abolished soon, conditions for the slave will only get worse. Slave owners like the Shelbys will eventually degenerate into slave owners like Legree, but Tom will always be Tom.

Although Tom's benevolence allows readers to identify with him more easily, it does create a secondary problem. As Ryan explains, "[T]his language of benevolence also asserted the superiority (racial, regional, moral) of the helper and otherness of the helped" ("Charity" 760). So while Hutcheson asserts that benevolence is based on an internal sense we all possess, Ryan argues that even within this supposed equality, there often exists a hierarchy. Stowe negates this hierarchical otherness, Ryan goes on to argue, by putting her characters in situations with which her readers would be able to identify, such as losing a child:

> In order to achieve its mission of generating antislavery sentiment and action, particularly in the North, the novel asks readers to identify with suffering people across racial and regional divides. Stowe uses the psychology of benevolent affiliation (a sense of immediacy, proximity, even empathy) to create a feeling of responsibility where actually proximity and similarity may not exist, asking readers to imagine or relive the loss of their own children, for example, with the slaves whose actual or threatened losses she represents. Mrs. Bird, the senator's wife who takes pity on the runaway slave Eliza and her son, enacts within the text the very process of benevolence via

> identification that Stowe encourages among readers: she weeps over her dead child's folded garments as she prepares a care package for the fugitives. ("Charity" 760)

This identification across color lines therefore creates a bond between reader and character—Noble's concept of "sentimental wounding"—that elicits benevolent feelings without emphasizing the otherness of the enslaved.

When Uncle Tom's Cabin is read ethically, Stowe does more than negate the otherness to which Ryan refers. Significantly, Stowe actually positions the reader as Other. By situating Tom as the model of benevolent actions, Tom becomes the helper, and the reader—benefiting from Tom's moral guidance—becomes the helped. The hierarchical otherness is transposed in Uncle Tom's Cabin, and the reader can only escape being the helped by becoming the helper, which is exactly the action to which Stowe hoped the novel would spur readers. Stowe anticipates that, in order to escape the discomfort of being the helped, her readers will work against slavery to regain their position as the helper. As she wrote in a letter to Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the National Era, when she was in the early stages of writing Uncle Tom's Cabin, "I feel now that the time has come when even a woman or a child who can speak a word for freedom and humanity is bound to speak. [. . .] I hope every woman who can write will not be silent" (qtd. in Hedrick 208). In Uncle Tom's Cabin, Stowe answers the question she posed to her brother Henry: "Must we forever keep calm and smile when every sentiment of manliness and humanity is kicked and rolled in the dust and lies trampled and bleeding[?]" The answer she provides in the novel is a resounding *no*. In order to recover from their ethical anguish, readers must ultimately put down the book and do something.

At the conclusion of the novel, George relates the sad news of Tom's death to his family and friends on the Shelby plantation. After giving his father's slaves their free papers, George reminds them: "Think of your freedom, every time you see UNCLE TOM'S CABIN; and let it be a memorial to put you all in mind to follow in his steps, and be as honest and faithful and Christian as he was" (380). As Tom's physical cabin is to serve as a reminder of his moral benevolence to those on the Shelby plantation, so the book Uncle Tom's Cabin serves as a reminder to readers to continue the moral benevolence in which they participated throughout their literary journey. As they close the novel, readers understand why Stowe's "heart burns," and they no longer count themselves among those unwilling to take a stand on "so very simple a point of morality as this."

In Uncle Tom's Cabin, Stowe manages not only to create a character with which readers can relate but also to situate readers so that they rely on Tom to model for them how to navigate the ethical anguish that slavery presents. While many still dismiss Uncle Tom's Cabin as an overly sentimental representation of slavery, when the novel is placed in nineteenth-century context and Tom is read as the ethical center of the novel, readers recognize that the novel is historically significant not only because it was the first major piece of fiction to challenge slavery, but also because Stowe locates the morality of the antislavery movement in the slave himself.

Uncle Tom's Cabin exposed nineteenth-century readers to the world of the enslaved and changed readers' understanding of the system in which they lived and participated. Gerrig suggests that the final element in the "literal experience of being transported" is that the transportation itself changes the reader. He writes, "For the majority of narratives, we

would be surprised if some mental structures were not changed as a function of their experience. At a minimum, we would expect to have created memory representations to encode the actual propositional information in the narrative" (16). Simply put, although a reader knows what he or she has read is fiction, the reader is still shaped by his or her reading experience.

When Uncle Tom's Cabin is read through an ethical lens with Tom at the novel's moral center, it is apparent that Tom is neither a coward nor an "Uncle Tom" in the modern sense of the phrase. Instead, Tom is an ethical hero who, rather than submit to white authority, subverts the benevolent hierarchy through his consistent demonstration of ethical courage. Tom's focus is not on abolition, but Stowe shows us that leading a moral life will necessarily lead to the termination of slavery. Regrettably, as Gary Younge points out in "Don't Blame Uncle Tom," "By the second world war, Uncle Tom had become a byword for lickspittle subservience in the face of racial oppression." Ernest Allen locates the initial shift toward using Uncle Tom as a racial slur in the 1930s, when "Black scholars picked (the term) up and just started throwing it at each other. [. . .] The 1960s were very similar. There's a sharp political struggle taking place in which you have to decide to be on the side of change or to offer excuses for the status quo, and that leads to a second wave of anti-Tomism" (qtd. in Hamilton 25). This negative image of Uncle Tom persists and continues to serve as a shortcut for dismissing any African American who has not embraced a philosophy of physically resisting racial oppression in America. Ironically, though Uncle Tom's Cabin helped to end slavery, the modern interpretation of the Uncle Tom figure demonstrates that the work Stowe began has not yet been finished.

CHAPTER II

"SOMEONE EVEN LESS COURAGEOUS THAN I": THE ETHICS OF HISTORICAL IMAGINING IN OCTAVIA E. BUTLER'S KINDRED

In one of Kindred's pivotal scenes, the main character, Dana, reduces a slave she meets when she travels to the past to the stereotypes she has learned in the twentieth century. She says of Sarah, "She was the [. . .] house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom" (145). Octavia E. Butler builds on the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe and tackles contemporary Uncle Tom and Mammy stereotypes in her 1979 novel. Butler demonstrates throughout Kindred that Dana's view of the past is an unfair amalgam of what she has gleaned from the media and the militant leaders of the 1960s. Just as Stowe hoped that Uncle Tom's Cabin would bring the ethics of slavery to the forefront for northern white readers, who were often quite ignorant about the realities of the slave system, Butler wanted to convince her readers—both white and black—to confront the nation's ignorance of the past. Butler refuses to let her main character, or her readers for that matter, lazily adopt the "It was a different time back then" philosophy. "The concept embodied in a phrase such as 'It was a different time back then' is an interesting one," Valerie Babb points out, "for it conveniently absolves past figures, particularly white American males, from ethical reproach" (89). Butler, however, also sees the consequences of refusing to recognize that, for African Americans, it *was* "a different time" and, as such, Americans should not judge by contemporary ethical standards those who had been enslaved.

In Kindred, Dana, a 26-year-old African-American writer who has recently married a white man, Kevin Franklin, is called back in time to antebellum Maryland six times over a

span of several weeks. Butler's choice to write Kindred as a science-fiction novel set in the antebellum South allowed her to explore the interaction between the past and the present in the ways she saw them connected. The time travel Butler uses to place Dana in the past is the only science fiction aspect of the novel, and even that is a vague component of the narrative. Robert Crossley notes in the introduction to Kindred that "[p]erhaps Butler deliberately sacrificed the neat closure that a scientific—or even pseudo-scientific—explanation of telekinesis and chronoportation would have given her novel. [. . .] Butler leaves the reader uneasy and disturbed by the intersection of story and history rather than comforted by a tale that 'makes sense'" (xi). This strategy is one that is also employed by Toni Morrison in her celebrated novel Beloved (1987). In Morrison's 2004 foreword to the novel, she explains: "I wanted the reader to be kidnapped, thrown ruthlessly into an alien environment as the first step into a shared experience with the book's population—just as the characters were snatched from one place to another, from any place to any other, without preparation or defense" (xviii). Similar to the feeling of helplessness Morrison forces onto readers of Beloved is the tangible suffering of slavery that Butler imposes on her heroine, Dana, a modern black woman.

Dana eventually recognizes that she is being called back in time to save the life of her impetuous and self-destructive white ancestor, Rufus Weylin. Since Rufus is a distant relative of Dana's, her own existence relies on Rufus's survival, at least until Alice, one of Rufus's slaves and his concubine, gives birth to Dana's direct descendent, Hagar. Each time Dana travels back in time to the Weylin plantation, survival becomes more and more difficult for her. The first two times she is called into the past, Rufus is only a small boy, unable to exert any power over her, and her contact with Mr. and Mrs. Weylin is limited. Significantly, Dana

can only return to 1976 when she believes her life is in danger, and the more time she spends in the past, the better she is able to cope with slavery's atrocities without fearing for her life. Having a rifle aimed at her scares her enough to send her home from her first trip to the past (14); however, as she adapts to the brutality of the slave era, it takes increasingly dangerous situations to send Dana back to 1976, and she eventually must resort to slitting her own wrists to get back to the future (239).

Although Rufus initially views Dana as a confidant, as he grows into a young man, his childhood curiosity transforms into adult suspicion and bitterness. Rufus is truly the product of a slave society; he wants everything his way and, as a white man, believes he deserves it. Shortly before his death, he even goes so far as to tell Alice that he has sold their children, just to exert his control over her. He later tells Dana that he lied to Alice about the children being sold "[t]o punish her, scare her. To make her see what could happen if she didn't . . . if she tried to leave me" (251). Since Rufus is Dana's ancestor, she cannot let him die without risking her own existence, and so she saves his life time and again. Even after her direct ancestor Hagar is born, Dana continues to protect Rufus. But when he finally crosses a line that she vowed never to let him cross, she kills him in self-defense. Only once Rufus is dead is Dana able to remain in 1976.

Butler's choice of 1976 as the year in which Dana initially lives indicates that America's bicentennial celebration influenced the writing of the novel. Although the country was celebrating 200 years of independence, blacks had not enjoyed freedom in the United States for nearly that long, and even after they were legally freed from slavery, their rights in this country continued to be severely limited. According to Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu in Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered, "For many

blacks, the celebration of America as truly their own country was an empty one" (144). Samuel DuBois Cook expressed a similar attitude in a 1976 issue of The Journal of Politics:

> Black politics, in this Bicentennial year, is characterized, also, by a deep sense of frustration, anguish, drift, wandering, and a tinge of cynicism and hopelessness. [. . .] Is it not time, on the occasion of the celebration of the Bicentennial, for American freedom and justice to be extended and applied equally to all [?] (294)

This Bicentennial frustration stemmed in large part from the inaccurate historical memory many Americans have of the past and that continues to be held in the collective American memory. However, it is important to recognize that this view of history only represents white Americans. Many black Americans, including Phillis Wheatley, were still enslaved, ironically, as the Founding Fathers penned oft-quoted lines of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The Revolutionary era is imagined as a time when independence and freedom were fully realized and British tyranny was ended, and it is this idealized version of 1776 that was celebrated during the Bicentennial. In honor of the Bicentennial, the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) announced that "[t]he first medals voted by the Continental Congress in commemoration of America's great Revolutionary War heroes are being restruck by the United States Mint" (47). These medals, of course, depicted ten white heroes of the war, and the 1974 reproduction of this series did not add any coins to celebrate the contributions of minority heroes, such as Crispus Attucks or Phillis Wheatley. Perhaps more telling about the attitudes of Americans regarding the Bicentennial is that representatives of minority groups sought out ARBA for assurances that they would be

included in the celebration. After a two-day conference, a "committee was charged with the responsibility of developing guidelines for minority participation in the Bicentennial." Additionally, minority leaders were "encouraged [. . .] to bring the message back to their hometowns and not to wait for Washington to direct them into Bicentennial efforts but busily initiate their own roles" (65, 70). This guaranteed inclusion of minorities in the Bicentennial celebration could not reshape the way Americans imagined history, however. President Ford's celebratory message exemplified the country's focus on its white past: "While reaching for the unknown, Americans have also kept their faith in the wisdom and experience of the past. Colonists and immigrants brought with them cherished values and ideals—in religion and culture, in law and learning—which, mixed with the American way, gave us our rich inheritance" (ARBA 322). No mention is made of those Americans who did not immigrate by choice or of those who were already living here.

This mis-remembering, it seems, is at the heart of Butler's novel. Butler argues throughout Kindred that when imagining the past, one must be careful not to apply incorrect beliefs to historical situations. In "Not Enough of the Past: Feminist Revisions of Slavery in Octavia E. Butler's Kindred," Angelyn Mitchell explains "that the past is shaped, or constructed, by the present as to what we choose to remember as well as what we choose to forget, and by the way we choose to interpret that which is remembered" (55). Despite all that has been learned about African American history, many white Americans continue to remember the birth of the nation as a celebration of independence from tyranny. But that view of history is not complete, and when one continues to celebrate that inaccurate history, he is making an unethical choice to disregard—or worse, to judge—those who did not fit into that imagined history.

Just as the past is constructed by the present, how the American past is collectively remembered defines Americans as a group and shapes the country's future. Robert Jensen, in his book The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege, discusses the importance of history, especially in terms of race relations in the United States. He writes, "History matters. It matters whether we tell the truth about what happened centuries ago, and it matters whether we tell the truth about more recent history" (44). Butler's novel captures this idea that history matters. Further, she explores the ethical consequences of the ways in which history is imagined.

Beaulieu further historicizes the novel by placing it in context with Alex Haley's wildly successful 1976 work Roots, which also became television's highest-rated entertainment program when it was turned into a mini-series the following year ("Roots"). Butler states that she had not read Roots while she was doing her research for Kindred (Snider); however, Beaulieu sees Kindred and other neo-slave narratives by authors such as Morrison and Sherley Anne Williams as a reaction to the "male point of view" that Haley uses to describe the effects of slavery in his work (146). Although Roots was revolutionary in that it drew white as well as black audiences to a story about black ancestry, it did neglect to focus on the strength and persistence of the female slave (Beaulieu 147). Interestingly, Butler admits that she originally intended for her protagonist to be male, but she quickly realized, "I couldn't realistically keep him alive. So many things that he did would have been likely to get him killed" (Rowell 51). Unlike the character Tom in Uncle Tom's Cabin, who does not need to survive for his story to be told by the novel's omniscient narrator, Dana tells her own story and must survive in order to tell it. Consequently, Butler's choice of a female protagonist gave voice to the female slaves who received limited attention in Haley's work.

At the time of Kindred's publication in 1979, slavery had been illegal in the United States for more than a century. The Modern Civil Rights Movement, however, had been in full swing only two decades earlier, and Butler knew all too well what was at stake for black Americans. In several interviews, Butler discusses the times she saw her mother, a domestic, demoralized and degraded in the home of the white people for whom she worked. "I used to see her going in back doors, being talked about while she was standing right there and basically being treated like a non-person, something beneath notice," Butler recalls in an interview in Black Scholar. "And I could see her later as I grew up. I could see her absorbing more of what she was hearing from the whites than I think even she would have wanted to absorb" (Beal 15).

These childhood experiences of seeing her mother treated poorly by whites led Butler, as a young adult, to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement where she witnessed firsthand the betrayal that other African Americans felt toward the generations before them. Butler explicitly places the impetus for Kindred in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s:

> When I got into college, Pasadena City College, the black nationalist movement, the Black Power Movement, was really underway with the young people, and I heard some remarks from a young man who was the same age I was but who had apparently never made the connection with what his parents did to keep him alive. He was still blaming them for their humility and their acceptance of disgusting behavior on the part of employers and other people. He said, "I'd like to kill all these old people who have been holding us back for so long. But I can't because I'd have to start with my

> own parents." When he said *us* he meant black people, and when he said *old people* he meant older black people. That was actually the germ of the idea for Kindred (1979). I've carried that comment with me for thirty years. He felt so strongly ashamed of what the older generation had to do, without really putting it into the context of being necessary for not only their lives but his as well. (Rowell 51, author's emphasis)

Contrary to the young man who resented his parents for "accepting" their inferior status as black Americans, Butler recognized that previous generations of African Americans had "endured experiences that would kill me" (Beal 15). Butler acknowledged that the generations before her often lacked the power to change the political and social world around them. She saw her opportunity in Kindred to show both the constant oppression that blacks suffered under the system of slavery and in the pre-Civil Rights era, as well as the choices that those oppressed made to survive and to protect their loved ones. A. Timothy Spaulding, author of Re-Forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative, views the writing of Kindred as a way for Butler to "force those who harshly criticize their parents (and perhaps their enslaved ancestors as well) into an active and visceral confrontation with the hardships of slavery and racial oppression in direct terms" (45). Dana comes to learn through her travels that the qualities she would ascribe to a morally strong individual—independence, dignity, and a willingness to fight for what is right—are the exact opposite of the qualities a slave needed to survive a life of servitude. When Alice, mauled by dogs and nearly starved to death, is brought back after her attempted escape, Dana sees firsthand that clinging to independence and dignity can lead to unimaginable pain and suffering. She sees through the character of Sarah the cook that one

learns to accept her place after seeing her babies sold away from her, one by one. Dana learns from her own reliance on Sarah, Carrie, Alice, Kevin, and even on Rufus that it is not wise—or perhaps not even possible—to maintain independence on a plantation. Slaves did not fight their enslavement in the ways that a twentieth-century woman like Dana would expect and want them to, but they did find ways to assert their humanity despite their enslavement, and that was the biggest moral victory most of them could ever hope to achieve.

Stowe wanted readers to imagine the country without slavery; over a century later, Butler pushes readers to deal with the legacies of slavery and move beyond inaccurate judgments of the past. Dana's 1976 perspective shapes not only her ways of dealing with enslavement, but also her moral judgment of slavery. Her view of slavery is fundamentally different from that of her fellow slaves in the novel, as well as that of Uncle Tom, in that she has seen the results of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments and the Civil Rights Movement. Additionally, Dana's morality is based on her twentieth-century sensibilities regarding right and wrong, rather than on the Christian doctrine on which Uncle Tom bases his faith. Perhaps it is the lack of Christian influence that accounts for her alternate view of what is morally acceptable, or perhaps it is an understanding that history will ultimately take her side that allows her to make different choices than did her literary ancestors.

Butler seems to recognize the moral courage of a character like Uncle Tom and, in Kindred, explores the ethical dangers of imagining the past with a limited memory. In contrast to Stowe, who created Uncle Tom as the benevolent and moral center of Uncle Tom's Cabin in order to argue in favor of abolition, Butler places Dana at the ethical center of Kindred to convince contemporary readers that they have no right to judge the actions—

or lack of action—of those who had been enslaved. Although the moral behaviors of both Tom and Dana are rooted in contemporary American values, those values shaped the audience's expectation of Dana's moral choices in a much different way than they did Uncle Tom's. Additionally, Butler had to confront historical mis-remembering and its ethical consequences in ways that Stowe never would have dreamed. As Dana experiences a life of enslavement, she begins to imagine the past differently, and her ethical response to enslavement evolves, as did the Civil Rights Movement itself, from a passive to a more active approach. She eventually comes to acknowledge Uncle Tom's type of moral courage in the Weylin slaves but, because she knows a life outside of slavery, Dana finally gives readers what they want—a rejection of Uncle Tom's moral courage in favor of the physical courage many black Americans in the 1970s had come to embrace.

Just as Stowe helps readers to benevolently imagine themselves as abolitionists fighting against the wrongs of slavery, Butler encourages readers to see the ethical implications of historical imagining. Butler employs Dana as a way both to bridge the past and the present and to examine the ways in which the past continues to shape the present. But Butler also uses Dana to explore how the present shapes our view of the past and our expectations of the people who inhabit that past. Like the soreness Dana experiences on her shoulder after Rufus's mother "bruised it with her desperate blows" (24), the pain of slavery continues to exist long after it has ended. This seems an important aspect for Butler to explore, since many contemporary attitudes towards African Americans are rooted in the stereotypes and justifications created while slavery was still legal. Just as Butler said of her mother that she "absorb[ed] more of what she was hearing from the whites than I think

even she would have wanted to absorb," Butler recognized that slavery had not only skewed the perceptions that whites have of blacks but that it also twisted the view that blacks have of themselves. The young man Butler heard say, "I'd like to kill all these old people who have been holding us back for so long. But I can't because I'd have to start with my own parents," failed to see this connection between the past and the present. He did not recognize that "all these old people" did not start with a clean slate when they were born. Rather, they inherited all of the animosity and suffering that had plagued their parents and grandparents for generations. By reading Kindred in ethical terms, it is possible to give credit to those people for what they were able to accomplish, rather than blame them for not resisting their oppression in more obvious ways.

For readers who imagine our history as simply one of democracy and equality, a character who does not fight for his rights is viewed as weak. It is this incorrectly imagined past that has led to the image of Uncle Tom as a sellout, rather than as the morally iconic figure that he becomes when Uncle Tom's Cabin is read through an ethical lens. Readers make the mistake of equating violence with power, but philosopher Hannah Arendt claims that there is an important distinction between the two. "Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power" (53). Stowe recognized this distinction between power and violence, and she could not allow Tom to react to his enslavement violently. Killing Legree would not have empowered Tom. Rather, Tom is empowered by his nonviolent resistance. Ironically, it is in part due to the popular misreading of the Uncle Tom figure that Butler needed to continue the work Stowe started with Uncle Tom's Cabin. Modern society does not see Uncle Tom as ethically courageous;

rather, the term "Uncle Tom" has become a dismissive one, used to relegate as cowardly anyone who is perceived not to stand up to injustice. Butler exposes this view when Dana initially dismisses Sarah as a "mammy" figure, a "female Uncle Tom." This dismissive interpretation of Uncle Tom influenced black thought and action in the 1960s and 1970s. Even Malcolm X referred to "Uncle Toms"—blacks who helped whites keep other blacks down. In his November 10, 1963, "Message to the Grassroots," X focuses a lengthy portion of his address on the problems of so-called "Uncle Toms":

> Just as the slavemaster of that day used Tom, the house Negro, to keep the field Negroes in check, the same old slavemaster today has Negroes who are nothing but modern Uncle Toms, 20th century Uncle Toms, to keep you and me in check, keep us under control, keep us passive and peaceful and nonviolent. That's Tom making you nonviolent. It's like when you go to the dentist, and the man's going to take your tooth. You're going to fight him when he starts pulling. So he squirts some stuff in your jaw called novocaine, to make you think they're not doing anything to you. So you sit there and 'cause you've got all of that novocaine in your jaw, you suffer peacefully. Blood running all down your jaw, and you don't know what's happening. 'Cause someone has taught you to suffer—peacefully.
>
> [. . .] To keep you from fighting back, [the white man] gets these old religious Uncle Toms to teach you and me, just like novocaine, suffer peacefully.

Even a prominent Civil Rights leader like Malcolm X, who had read Uncle Tom's Cabin (Haley and X 191), failed to recognize Uncle Tom's ethical courage and instead used the

contemporary figure of Uncle Tom as a way to dismiss the tactics of leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., who preached non-violent resistance as a means for gaining Civil Rights.

Butler, herself very aware of the progression of the Civil Rights Movement, and especially aware of the philosophy of the Black Power Movement, crafted Kindred for this post-Civil Rights Movement audience. Dana confronts the harsh realities of slavery and its impact on individuals, but Butler also fashions Dana, as the moral center of the novel, in a way that parallels the evolution of the Civil Rights Movement itself. Audiences in the mid-1970s had witnessed the progression of the Civil Rights Movement and the violence that it often engendered. They had seen national leaders, black and white alike, assassinated, and they were still struggling to desegregate some of the more resistant communities in the South. Many of Butler's black readers would have been familiar with the progression of the Civil Rights Movement from Booker T. Washington, who took what many viewed as an "accommodationist" approach (Zangrando and Zangrando 145), to Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, who advocated "armed self-defense" when necessary (Stern 626).

Washington controversially espoused the view that if black individuals would forego civil rights and instead dedicate themselves to hard work and moral strength, they would earn their rights within the American system and eventual acceptance as citizens by white Americans (Zangrando and Zangrando 145). Early in Kindred, Butler's portrayal of Dana seems to align with this philosophy. Dana was raised by her aunt and uncle—the terms often assigned to older slave figures, such as Uncle Tom—after her parents died, and they wanted her to become "a nurse, a secretary, or a teacher" (55). After losing her job in the publicity department of an aerospace company, readers learn, Dana began doing temporary work. She kept her head down and did what was expected, needful of the paycheck and hopeful that

her efforts might eventually be noticed and appreciated, as it was at the aerospace company where, she tells Kevin, she started out as "a clerk-typist, but I talked my way into their publicity office. I was doing articles for their company newspaper and press releases to send out. They were glad to have me do it once I showed them I could" (56). Dana believes that she has liberated herself from her aunt and uncle and their low expectations, but she is still limited by her accommodationist approach. When she begins to travel back to antebellum Maryland, Dana's attitude continues to shift away from the Washingtonian belief that her hard work will eventually earn her the recognition she deserves. As a slave, she realizes that she will never be appreciated for or benefit from her efforts. At this point in the narrative, Dana must begin to place her future survival in the context of history. She must be able to historically imagine her own way out of slavery.

Butler sets up the novel to be read in these ethical terms by creating Dana as a young black woman who has internalized negative beliefs and stereotypes about the generations who preceded her. Although Dana is not as hostile toward her ancestors as is the young man who talks of killing his parents, she considers herself superior to blacks whom she views as sellouts. Dana's haughtiness is immediately challenged when, on her second trip into the past, she sees a slave being whipped. The "reality" she had known, that based on what she learned from the media, is quickly shown to be invalid. As she witnesses the whipping of Alice's father by white patrollers, she remembers:

> I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. I

> was probably less prepared for the reality than the child crying not far from me. (36)

Although Dana has imagined herself as informed regarding the horrors of slavery, this first visceral experience forces her to realize that what she thought she knew was completely different from the brutal reality of enslavement. This initial realization is Dana's first step toward recognizing the courage slaves embodied merely in surviving such brutality.

As Dana begins to know the slaves on the Weylin plantation, she grows to understand more deeply the suffering that they have experienced. She quickly learns that the cook, Sarah, has lost all but one of her children. Sarah tells Dana, "First my man died—a tree he was cutting fell on him. Then Marse Tom took my children, all but Carrie. And, bless God, Carrie ain't worth much as the others 'cause she can't talk. People think she ain't got good sense" (76). Dana recalls how she reacted to this confession by Sarah: "I looked away from her. The expression in her eyes had gone from sadness—she seemed almost ready to cry—to anger. Quiet, almost frightening anger. Her husband dead, three children sold, the fourth defective, and her having to thank God for the defect" (76). When Alice's father is whipped, Butler puts her readers in a position of beginning to understand the tangible effects of slavery; Sarah's story further pushes both Dana and readers to recognize that their historical imagining of what constituted slavery is neither accurate nor ethical. When enslaved, one must not think only of him- or herself, but of family, as well, since that family can all too easily be separated. Slaveholders recognized these family bonds and even used them—unethically—against slaves. Stowe focused largely on this aspect of slavery and pushed her contemporary readers to imagine losing a child or spouse; she wanted her white northern readers to recognize that blacks suffered the same pain over losing a child as did

whites. Butler, too, attempts to change how readers view slavery. Instead of focusing on the ways in which slaves were similar to her white readers as Stowe does, however, Butler addresses the differences between slaves and her readers. Just as Stowe's readers needed to be shown that blacks suffered the same agony over the loss of a child as whites, Butler's readers needed to be shown that, although they think that they themselves would physically resist enslavement, fighting back was often not a realistic possibility for actual slaves. Part of the faultiness of historical imagining has been that contemporary values are projected onto someone in a situation that cannot be fathomed and, therefore, should not be judged.

Dana is forced to re-imagine her historical survival as she begins to understand viscerally the brutality of enslavement. Upon making the realization that an accommodationist attitude like that of Washington cannot work for her in the antebellum South, Dana's approach continues to evolve as did the Civil Rights Movement. Ethically speaking, Washington's accommodationist approach did not provide what W. E. B. Du Bois calls "insurance of robust, healthy mental and moral development" (891). Du Bois would later argue in The Souls of Black Folk (1903) that accepting the South's ill-treatment of African Americans was itself an immoral act. For, he writes, "It is wrong to encourage a man or a people in evil-doing; it is wrong to aid and abet a national crime simply because it is unpopular not to do so" (891). Following what they believed to be their moral imperative, Du Bois and other activists, such as William Monroe Trotter and Ida Wells Barnett, "sought the full range of civic, educational, political, and economic opportunities" for African Americans (Zangrando and Zangrando 145). Dana, too, realizes that she must seek out opportunities for self-improvement rather than rely on whites to recognize her abilities. On some level, she even feels that *not* seeking out such opportunities would signal a moral

acceptance of her enslavement. She primarily turns to education as the means by which to level the playing field on the Weylin plantation. She begins by trying to educate herself. Upon her return home after her second trip to the past, Dana and Kevin scour history books and encyclopedias, gleaning whatever they can about the geography of Maryland in the hopes that they can discern some way for Dana to escape to the North if she is again called to the past (48-49). Dana takes this need for education further when, back on the Weylin plantation yet again, she agrees to teach the young slaves Nigel and Carrie to read, despite laws against slaves being educated. Kevin urges Dana, "Do a good job with Nigel [. . .]. Maybe when you're gone, he'll be able to teach the others" (101).

Dana guiltily realizes that she should have offered to teach Nigel to read instead of waiting for him to ask. She had already been reading to Rufus on a daily basis, after all. Readers can sense that Dana, like Butler's mother, has internalized a sense of duty to whites, but has not yet internalized that same sense of duty to other blacks. Dana here becomes Butler's mother, working for whites and accepting their ill treatment because she has internalized her social inferiority. Dana even allows Rufus's mother Margaret to slap her and call her a "filthy black whore" for sleeping in the same room as Kevin (93). Dana does not realize that she, too, is acting the "mammy" or the "female Uncle Tom," even as she judges Sarah and the other slaves for putting up with unacceptable behavior towards them. Dana's moral education is still evolving, and Butler uses the scene with Margaret to illustrate how easy it is both to internalize negative stereotypes without realizing it and to judge others for that same internalization. Dana is still incorrectly imagining history when she fails to realize that even she "accepts" slavery, despite her assertion that she will not allow herself to be treated like chattel. She has not yet been able to historically imagine her way out of slavery,

because she has not yet come to accept that the legacies of slavery affect who she is, even in 1976.

Dana's historical imagining again shifts when she is caught with one of Weylin's books and is whipped (107). Just as she realized that an accommodationist approach could not benefit her in slavery, Dana recognizes when she is whipped that educating herself and others is also too passive. By the 1960s, anger was brewing in African American communities as young blacks realized that one hundred years after the end of the Civil War, they had still not gained equal rights in a country that their ancestors had toiled to build. Leaders of the Black Power Movement sought to harness this anger and organize the black youth. But being angry, the young activists were told, was not enough. Members of the Black Power Movement were urged to demand their rights and physically take them when necessary. The leaders of Civil Rights Movement realized that seeking "the full range of [. . .] opportunities" was not an assertive enough approach to gaining civil rights; likewise, Dana recognizes that her attempts at educating herself and her fellow slaves are not enough. Just as the tactics of some Civil Rights Movement leaders became more aggressive in the 1960s, Dana's approach evolves into a more confrontational style. Dana's final strategy for handling her enslavement emerges from the Black Power Movement, when leaders like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael spoke against the non-violent practices of other leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and instead maintained the black individual's right to self-defense. Malcolm X advocated this philosophy, saying in a 1963 speech, "Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery."

Butler explicitly demonstrates Dana's dawning Black Power mentality in the way Dana thinks about Sarah. Dana cannot imagine that she would have allowed her children to be sold away from her, and she looks down on Sarah for her cowardice. Dana thinks of Sarah, "She had reason for more than anger. How amazing that Weylin had sold her children and still kept her to cook his meals. How amazing that he was still alive" (76). Dana implies that Sarah *should* have killed Weylin for selling her children as, readers assume, Dana would if she were in Sarah's place. Dana begins to realize what Sarah has endured, but she still regards Sarah with a late twentieth-century attitude, looking down on her for not standing up for herself and her children:

> She had done the safe thing—accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid. She was the kind of woman who might have been called "mammy" in some other household. She was the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties. The house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom—the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose, and who knew as little about the freedom of the North as she knew about the hereafter.
>
> I looked down on her myself for a while. Moral superiority. Here was someone even less courageous than I was. That comforted me somehow. (145)

Dana continues to judge the Weylin slaves and projects a Black Power philosophy onto them. She cannot see the moral courage of Sarah; Dana views Sarah as cowardly because she does not stand up for herself and her children physically. In this one scene, the ethics of historical imagining, the nexus of past and present, and the autobiographical component of

Butler's life intersect and are made explicit. Readers see how Dana's inadequate historical imagining shapes how she expects people in the past to respond to their historical circumstances the way that those in the Black Power Movement think they themselves would. Dana also reflects the internalized self-doubt that Butler saw in her mother but, like Butler's mother, Dana cannot see the extent to which these internalized thoughts have clouded her own judgment.

Interestingly, Butler uses in her description of Sarah the phrase "Uncle Tom" as representing, as David Pilgrim defines it, "a Black person who is humiliatingly subservient or deferential to White people." Even Dana, although Butler presents her as an intelligent woman, fails to see the moral courage represented by the character of Uncle Tom. Instead, she has fallen into the twentieth-century trap of relegating Tom to the status of a coward because he did not use his physical strength to fight against slavery, and so as soon as Dana calls Sarah a "female Uncle Tom," she dismisses Sarah as weak. Although Stowe's Uncle Tom was a morally courageous character, Dana views him as a sellout, someone who did not stand up for his race. Dana projects this view of Uncle Tom onto Sarah, but in creating this parallel between Sarah and Uncle Tom, Butler also creates a parallel between their reactions to slavery. Just as Tom responds to his enslavement with moral courage by holding fast to his faith while separated from his family, Sarah, in her own way, demonstrates moral courage. Sarah finds a way to survive her enslavement, despite losing her husband in a tragic accident and seeing all but one of her children sold away. She resolves, "Things ain't bad here. I can get along" (145). Although Dana acknowledges that Sarah "knew as little about the freedom of the North as she knew about the hereafter," she still—unethically—judges Sarah from a 1976 perspective.

Dana is not immediately capable of recognizing Sarah's ethical courage. Her twentieth-century existence, like the "too-red blood substitute" on TV, has shielded her from the daily realities her ancestors faced while enslaved. Butler's creation of Sarah as a "female Uncle Tom" who embodies Tom's ethical courage demonstrates that Butler reads Uncle Tom's Cabin through the ethical lens suggested in Chapter I. Her construction of Dana as ignorant of Tom's moral courage highlights the power of historical imagining and how imagining incorrectly can skew one's view of history. In order to undermine Dana's attitude of superiority towards Weylin's slaves, Butler forces Dana into a situation where she must experience slavery firsthand. Just as Stowe forces Uncle Tom to confront a series of complex ethical situations, Butler places Dana into a situation that does not have an easy ethical response. In both cases, the ultimate goal is to force readers to rethink the way they view slavery and its legacies. Because Rufus is her ancestor, and because killing him would endanger her own survival, Dana is forced to live as a slave until Rufus's daughter Hagar—Dana's direct ancestor—is born. If not for this family tie, Dana could end her travels to the past by simply letting Rufus die. Given that she only travels to the past when his life is in danger, she has several opportunities to withhold her help and allow him to die in whatever predicament he finds himself. Butler skillfully withholds this power from Dana, however, and therefore puts her into a situation that is much more similar to that of the actual slaves on the Weylin plantation. Because she is not able to control the time that she spends in the past, Dana must temper her twentieth-century attitudes about how slaves should have acted or could have defended themselves.

Dana quickly learns that the slave system quite easily turns individuals into objects, and that even the individuals in question may start to doubt their own worth. She soon

learns firsthand that transforming people into slaves is not as difficult as she would have believed. After seeing black children playing at selling each other she tells Kevin, "I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery" (101). And after her attempted escape, Dana realizes that this applies even to her. As she lies suffering from her recent whipping, Dana recognizes:

> I knew about towns and rivers miles away—and it hadn't done me a damned bit of good! What had Weylin said? That educated didn't mean smart. He had a point. Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape. Yet in a few years an illiterate runaway named Harriet Tubman would make nineteen trips into this country and lead three hundred fugitives to freedom. What had I done wrong? Why was I still slave to a man who had repaid me for saving his life by nearly killing me. Why had I taken yet another beating. And why . . . why was I so frightened now—frightened and sick at the thought that sooner or later, I would have to run again? (177)

Dana, when she thinks of courageous slaves, thinks not of a morally courageous figure such as Uncle Tom, but of a physically courageous figure—Harriet Tubman. As she realizes that even she herself does not have the physical courage of Tubman, she is finally ready to stop judging the Weylin slaves. This realization marks a key point in Dana's ethical development. For the first time since her enslavement began, she has realized that she is just as "cowardly" as she thought Sarah was for being too afraid to run. She tells herself, "*See how easily slaves are made?*" (177, author's emphasis), and simultaneously reminds readers that they cannot judge those who were enslaved because they likely would have responded in similar ways.

Hagar's birth during Dana's fifth trip to the past means Dana is free to let Rufus die or even to kill him in order to end his ability to call her out of 1976. However, once she has this power that she has so long been wishing for, and which many twentieth-century Americans assume they would seize, Dana questions whether she can use it. Her relationship with Rufus is complicated, and she recognizes that slavery itself breeds complicated relationships among all involved. While at a celebration with the other slaves on the plantation, Dana recognizes how the Weylin slaves view Rufus:

> Strangely, they seemed to like him, hold him in contempt, and fear him all at the same time. This confused me because I felt just about the same mixture of emotions for him myself. I had thought my feelings were complicated because he and I had such a strange relationship. But then, slavery of any kind fostered strange relationships. (230)

That Dana is genetically linked to Rufus makes their relationship complicated, but it also makes it more similar to the type of complex relationships often found among slaves and their owners. Often, a white master might be a slave's biological father, or a white child may have been raised by a female house slave. The familial lines drawn in the slave system are not clear, and physically fighting a master could often mean attacking a blood relative. In this way, Butler successfully avoids the slave-master binary that Friedman views as a "dead end" and Kindred becomes a "relational narrative" wherein Dana and Rufus's relationship demonstrates that "the agonistic struggle between victim and victimizer is significantly complicated" (7).

Dana's relationship with Rufus is so complicated that although her 1976 sense of right and wrong justifies her killing the man who has enslaved her, her newly developed

nineteenth-century sensibilities tell her that killing Rufus is not a simple solution. Back in 1976 after her fifth trip to Maryland, Dana recalls for Kevin a conversation she had with Carrie that demonstrates Dana's unwillingness to make life any more difficult for the slaves she has come to know on the Weylin plantation:

> "[I]f I had let Rufus die, everyone would have been sold. More families would have been separated. [Carrie] has three children now."
>
> [Kevin] was silent for several seconds. Then, "She might be sold with her children if they're young. But I doubt that anyone would bother to keep her and her husband together. Someone would buy her and breed her to a new man. [. . .]."
>
> "Yes. So you see, my decision isn't as easy as you thought."
>
> "But . . . they're being sold anyway."
>
> "Not all of them. Good Lord, Kevin, their lives are hard enough."
>
> (242-43)

Dana continues to recognize the complexities of slavery. Doing what those of the Black Power Movement would have historically imagined to be right—letting Rufus die—would have punished not only Rufus but also all of the slaves on his plantation. The ethics of historical imagining here become glaringly obvious: imagining the past incorrectly has moral repercussions with which Dana is not sure she can live.

However, just as Dana seems unwilling to risk the security of the Weylin slaves, her modern morality also prevents her from accepting things as they are. In a morally critical moment in the text, Rufus asks Dana, "Do you know what would happen to the people here if I died?" Dana responds, "What bothers me [. . .] is what's going to happen to them if you

live" (226). In this one exchange, the crux of Dana's moral dilemma—in fact the moral dilemma of all slaves—is summed up: is it more moral to accept a life of enslavement, or to kill for a chance at freedom? Dana obviously believes the latter, and Butler's contemporary readers would likely agree. To murder Rufus is to reject what she has learned about historical imagining, but *not* to kill him is to become like the "old folks" that many of Butler's generation viewed as sellouts. In the end, Butler succeeds in making Rufus's murder understandable and justifiable to readers, but she also manages to help readers appreciate those who did not or could not murder their owners.

Although Butler crafts Dana so that, by this point, Dana can understand the ethical courage of Sarah and the other Weylin slaves, she still cannot allow Dana to become one of the "old folks" that the Black Power Movement condemned. Butler, like Stowe, had to navigate carefully her readers' prejudices and political attitudes in order to maintain readers' alignment with her protagonist. But unlike Uncle Tom, who demonstrates the benevolent, Christian behaviors that Stowe's nineteenth-century audience demanded, Dana must satisfy Butler's audience's desire to defend themselves against the barbs of injustice and racism. Although she attempts to claim her humanity non-violently through educating herself and by trying to enlighten Rufus, she ultimately recognizes that these methods do not work. Dana is finally willing to become violent when her last shred of dignity is on the line.

When Dana does kill Rufus, it is to protect herself from being raped, and so the murder itself poses little ethical dilemma for contemporary readers. But even when Rufus is threatening to assault her, Dana finds it difficult to kill this man on whom she has relied, both as a slave and as an ancestor, for her survival. Even when she realizes that Rufus will rape her if she does not stop him, Dana debates whether to kill him: "He lay with his head

on my shoulder, his left arm around me, his right hand still holding my hand, and slowly, I realized how easy it would be for me to continue to be still and forgive him even this. So easy, in spite of all my talk. But it would be so hard to raise the knife, drive it into the flesh I had saved so many times. So hard to kill . . ." (259-60). What Dana does not contemplate in this moment, however, is how killing Rufus will negatively impact the other slaves with whom she has lived and worked. There are consequences that extend far beyond Dana when Rufus dies; his other slaves—his real slaves—will be sold, sold away from their families and friends, sold into situations in the Deep South that could be much worse than what they experience in Maryland, and to masters much worse than Rufus, whom Dana helped raise. Dana knows these consequences, although she does not consciously factor them into her decision to kill Rufus. In her final attack on Rufus, Dana embraces the philosophy of the Black Power Movement as her only chance at asserting her humanity: she defends herself physically against Rufus when he attempts to rape her. In this moment, she decides that rather than be like the "old people" the young man in the Black Power Movement wanted to kill for putting up with white people, she will do the killing. When push comes to shove, it is not historical understanding that drives Dana, but her unwillingness to relinquish her own history as a modern black woman.

Of course, none of the actual slaves on the Weylin plantation has the moral freedom to decide at what point they will no longer tolerate slavery. For them, survival means not resisting or fighting back; it means not doing anything that will risk making their already miserable lives unbearable. When Nigel finds Dana with Rufus's lifeless body crumpled across her, her knife in his back, Nigel gasps "Dana, what . . . ? Oh no. God, no!" (260). Nigel's reaction to the murder of Rufus forces Dana to confront the harsh reality that life for

the Weylin slaves will now be even worse. They will most likely be separated from their families, and they will lose the community that has sustained them on the Weylin plantation for most of their lives. They cannot, as Dana does, escape to the future, escape from the punishment that will ultimately be delivered as a result of Rufus's murder. They do not even have the luxury of knowing that right will finally prevail and that a war will be fought to end slavery. History will eventually take the side of those enslaved, but they cannot know that from their position in time. Just as Dana realizes of Sarah that she "knew as little about the freedom of the North as she knew about the hereafter" (145), the slaves on the Weylin plantation do not have access to the historical understanding necessary for them to embrace Dana's ethical choices.

Prior to killing Rufus, Dana is complicit in slavery although she has the power to stop Rufus from harming his slaves. Unlike Uncle Tom, who is willing to die to protect Emmeline from being captured and raped by Legree, Dana is not willing to die—or rather, she is not willing to not be born—to protect Alice from being raped by Rufus. Alice becomes a symbol of the generations of African Americans who Butler recognized had done what they had to do to protect future generations. Dana comes to embody both Butler and Butler's mother in her development through the Civil Rights Movement: Dana benefits from Alice's self-sacrifice, as Butler benefited from her mother's selflessness, but Dana also compromises herself, as Butler's mother did for Butler, so that Hagar can be born.

Although she does not want to be the one to cause the separation of Weylin's slaves, Dana kills Rufus to save herself. She is presented with the same moral choice that Uncle Tom faces a number of times in Uncle Tom's Cabin, a choice to take care of himself or to suffer in order that others may be spared additional hardship. For Dana, taking a stand

against the injustice of slavery—at least once it gets to the point where she feels her inner being will be destroyed—is her moral responsibility, although there will be negative consequences for others. To allow Rufus to rape her when she has the means to kill him would be to condone his evil actions. It is here that audience becomes the defining difference between Uncle Tom's Cabin and Kindred. As Stowe addressed an audience who was debating the benefits and dangers of abolition, Uncle Tom could not react to his enslavement with physical courage because Stowe's audience would not allow it. Conversely, Dana cannot succumb to Rufus's sexual advances because Butler's audience, who had recently and forcefully been reminded by the Black Power Movement that blacks must be willing to defend themselves, would have viewed her, ironically, as an Uncle Tom.

In her moral portrayal of Dana, Butler is anticipating Morrison's ethically charged novel. Beloved's main character, Sethe, is based on Margaret Garner, an ex-slave who killed her own child rather than have the child enslaved by her former master. Despite this horrible action, Morrison manages to portray Sethe sympathetically. Readers recognize that Sethe is not an immoral woman; rather, she made a difficult decision in an impossible situation. Although not all readers agree that Sethe's decision was right, most can at least understand what prompted her infanticidal behavior. In defense of her actions, Sethe asserts, "It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (194). Like Sethe, Dana does not know what the future holds for her fellow slaves, but she knows she can protect herself and them from any further acts of brutality perpetuated by Rufus. Like Sethe, Dana feels it is her moral responsibility to act on what she knows. Again, Butler is asserting that readers have no right to judge the past, because they cannot ever truly *know* it.

Dana learns to understand the reasons why some slaves accepted their fate. After seeing Sarah's brokenheartedness as she talked about the death of her husband and the sale of all but one of her children; after witnessing Alice's body, torn and battered after being attacked by dogs; and after observing how even a decent young white boy like Rufus could grow into a cruel slave owner, Dana accepts that surviving enslavement means, at least to some extent, internalizing the fear and hatred that are used to keep slaves down. But although she understands all of this, there is too much of the twentieth century in Dana for her to accept her own fate as a slave, and there is too much of the twentieth century in Butler's readers for them to accept Dana as someone who does not physically resist rape and enslavement. Dana never entirely loses her self to enslavement. She does her best to help Rufus see her as a woman, rather than as a black woman, and she tries to instill a modern sensibility—and morality—in him by forcing him to recognize the cruelty he and his father enact on their slaves. Dana comes to understand why her fellow slaves cannot fight back, but she cannot be so like them that she denies the power she alone possesses. Although Uncle Tom is morally courageous in his willingness to die rather than commit an unjust act, Dana has the power to historically imagine herself surviving slavery; but that survival, previously dependent on Rufus's existence, can ultimately only be ensured by Rufus's death.

For Dana to embrace the moral courage demonstrated by Uncle Tom would have been to reject the progress that African Americans had made by the 1970s, and of which both she and her readers were well aware. But by showing Dana's development in a way that parallels the long, complex evolution of the Civil Rights Movement, Butler acknowledges the more recent attempts to gain civil rights, while simultaneously acknowledging and respecting

that those who were enslaved often had to rely not on physical but on moral courage in order to survive. Although Dana ultimately rejects what she has learned about the ethics of historical imagining, Butler holds her responsible for the decision she has made and forces her to live with what happens to the Weylin slaves after Rufus dies. Dana must come to terms with her role in the selling off of the Weylin slaves. Regardless of the guilt she feels, Dana has taken the only action that Butler's readers would allow her to take. And yet Butler refuses to make this easy.

When Dana finally returns to 1976 and Rufus can no longer call her to the past, she must come to terms with what Rufus's death meant to the people whom she had grown to love on the Weylin plantation. After she and Kevin travel to Maryland to search newspapers and records, they hypothesize that Nigel covered up Rufus's murder by setting fire to the house. They also surmise that almost all of those enslaved by Rufus were put up at slave auction shortly after the fire. They find a notice of sale in a newspaper where "[a]ll three of Nigel's sons were listed, but Nigel and Carrie were not. Sarah was listed, but Joe and Hagar were not. Everyone else was listed. Everyone" (263). Even Dana, who was there, cannot truly know what happened to Weylin's slaves after she left. If witnessing history firsthand is not enough, then certainly readers, who only "know" history from books and television, cannot accurately imagine the past. To pass judgment on previous generations, Butler demonstrates, is an unethical use of historical imagining. Dana learns what Lisa Long asserts in "A Relative Pain: The Rape of History in Octavia Butler's Kindred and Phyllis Alesia Perry's Stigmata": "History is always inside us, and it works its damage from the inside out" (462). Butler forces Dana to acknowledge the effect that slavery's legacies have had on her as a black woman in the twentieth century. Dana learns that slavery's complex relationships are

embodied within her, as she is descended from both white and black, free and enslaved. Dana must accept that she cannot escape her history, nor can she continue to participate in the mis-remembering of American history.

Despite Dana's inability to escape her past, Mitchell views the end of Kindred as hopeful. "That Dana and Kevin, both enlightened by their individual and shared experiences, are still together at the narrative's end suggests Butler's resolution of this complex issue," she writes. "Their interracial relationship can be read as a metaphor for how America may be healed. Their relationship, in other words, represents what is necessary for Americans to do to alleviate the pain of our common history; they each must confront the past" (70). Butler's hope is for a future that includes the possibility of blacks and whites working together. Until this happens, "the pain of our common history" will continue to poison how Americans—black and white—view themselves and each other.

CHAPTER III

"TELLIN' A TALE THAT WAS DEAR LONG AGO":

THE ETHICS OF STORYTELLING IN JAMES MCEACHIN'S TELL ME A TALE

Robert Jensen argues in The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege, "History matters. It matters whether we tell the truth about what happened centuries ago, and it matters whether we tell the truth about more recent history. It matters because if we can't, we will never be able to face the present, guaranteeing that our future will be doomed" (44). While Octavia E. Butler argues in Kindred that the way history is imagined matters, James McEachin pushes the importance of history even further in his novel Tell Me a Tale: A Novel of the Old South. McEachin foreshadows the doom that Jensen insists the country is in for if Americans do not find a way to "tell the truth" and "face" history in a more honest way. McEachin is neither arguing for abolition like Stowe nor trying to convince readers to understand what life was like for those enslaved like Butler. Published in 1996, Tell Me a Tale was written for an audience that just a few years before had witnessed video footage of Rodney King being beaten by white police officers and had experienced the media frenzy that surrounded the O. J. Simpson murder trial. For this audience, McEachin addresses justice in a way that Stowe and Butler did not. Unlike Stowe, who only allows Tom to receive justice in heaven, and Butler, who creates justice for Dana only when she can remain in 1976, McEachin places seventeen-year-old Moses at the moral center of the novel and creates a final sense of justice that punishes people for their unwillingness to "tell the truth." McEachin holds whites accountable for their past actions and insists that unless whites can acknowledge the suffering they have caused, there is no

way to move forward. As Jensen posits, white Americans must "tell the truth" in order for Americans—black and white—to avoid a future that is "doomed."

As a boy, Moses, the protagonist in Tell Me a Tale, had been held as a slave in Red Springs, North Carolina, until being freed after the Civil War. His white owner and father, Archibald McBride, largely ignored Moses, leaving him to be raised by an elderly slave on the farm, whom Moses lovingly referred to as Uncle Ben. Unlike the enslaved characters of Stowe's and Butler's novels, Moses did not suffer the physical brutality of slavery. Yet after Moses's emancipation, when they realized Archy McBride was on the verge of recognizing his biracial son and rebuilding his farm to leave to the boy, the white residents of Red Springs burned down Ben's shack, killing both Ben and Archy, who were asleep inside. Moses escaped, but he never forgave the white men of Red Springs who took his father and Uncle Benny.

Six years later, 17-year-old Moses returns to Red Springs and visits four of the old men who ruined his life and destroyed his legacy. While pretending to be interested in Red Springs and these men's "heroic" role in "alter[ing] the course of history" (40-41), Moses draws in his four white listeners by convincing them that he will tell them the story he has pieced together about them and their community. "Let *me* tell *you* the story! Let's see if the information *I've* pieced together is correct," he begins.

> "I'll tell *you* the story with the clear-cut understandin' that you have the privilege of stoppin' me at any point if I am wrong. Mind you, what I'll be sayin' comes from talkin' with the good *white* folks in Fayetteville, and from my own lil' ol' imagination. [. . .] You keep on sippin', and I'll keep on

> talkin'—tellin' a tale that was dear long ago. An' in the end? History will have to recall how fittin' it is." (38, author's emphasis)

As Moses tells his tale, his four white listeners fail to recognize him as the boy in the story. When they finally make this realization, it is too late; Moses has already tried and sentenced them for their crimes. The men die from the poison Moses put in their drinks, and the novel ends with the sense that justice has been served, albeit many years too late.

McEachin's novel is very closely and clearly tied to the slave literature that came before it. Just as Kindred can be read as a necessary response to Uncle Tom's Cabin, Tell Me a Tale might provide an answer to Butler's novel. Moses explains to the men of Red Springs, "most Negroes are now occupied doing research on [. . .] the existential existence of Homo Erectus to present-day man, emphasizing freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of previous acts" (21). Like Butler, McEachin explores the importance of history. But whereas Butler's Kindred seems to be primarily addressing black readers regarding their post-Black Power Movement attitudes toward their ancestors, McEachin's Tell Me a Tale addresses a white audience who refuses to acknowledge history and accept "responsibility for the consequences" of their actions. One of the white characters in the novel reminds Moses, "This is a white man's country. It'll be a white man's history" (37). But Moses rewrites that "white man's history" to include what happened to slaves like himself and his Uncle Benny. Throughout the novel, all Moses really wants is acknowledgment of his suffering from the men who caused it. This recognition is not easy to gain, however. Archy prophetically tells Ben, "Your slavery's over, but ain't nothin' gonna change. A hunnert years from today, *two* hunnert years from today, you still gonna be sufferin' an' shufflin'. You might not be shufflin' as much, but you gonna be sufferin' as much" (169, author's

emphasis). Despite the tales of progress that Americans tell themselves, McEachin demonstrates that race relations in the United States are not all that different now than they were shortly after the end of slavery. Like Butler, McEachin emphasizes that the present is shaped by the past.

Given the state of race relations in the United States, and especially in Los Angeles—McEachin's home—in the early 1990s, a cultural reading of the novel indicates that Tell Me a Tale is a reaction to the growing tension between white and black Americans. According to Robert J. Norrell, author of The House I Live In: Race in the American Century, "Black and white alienation reached such extremes in some places that justice seemed impossible" by the late 1980s (318). Two of the main examples pointed to by Norrell are that of Rodney King and O. J. Simpson. These notorious trials, both of which took place in the Los Angeles area, quickly exposed lingering racial tension and consequently pitted black and white Americans against each other. McEachin's novel gives expression to those black Americans who felt robbed of justice and deprived of a voice in a country that their ancestors had labored to build. The telling of this untold story is significant, as Lynne Tirrell, author of "Storytelling and Moral Agency," sees stories as capable of defining people. She says that "stories don't just tell us who we are, or who we have been. Stories tell us what we are capable of, and so they tell us who we might be" (117). Certainly if stories define "what we are capable of" and "who we might be," then it is crucial that the stories told are honest. The act of telling itself becomes an ethical act.

The ultimate, foundational story about slavery that still permeates our culture and collective memory is, of course, Uncle Tom's Cabin. Steven Railton claims, "If you're an African American writer, there's almost the sense that you can't start fresh [. . .]. You have to

keep going back to this text because, for much of America's history, it was *the* definitive account of slavery and race" (qtd. in Hamilton 23-24, author's emphasis). Butler engages the story of Uncle Tom in her critique of the contemporary Uncle Tom stereotype, but McEachin engages the story of Uncle Tom as the foundational story of slavery that must be reconsidered from a contemporary point of view. As Gary Younge points out in "Don't Blame Uncle Tom," "The one thing Stowe could not imagine, even though real-lifeheroes [sic] like slave rebel Nat Turner and underground railroad organiser Sojourner Truth existed to fuel her imagination, was that some might want to stay and fight." McEachin allows Moses to return to the place of his enslavement and fight to have his story told, unlike Stowe's Uncle Tom, who could only escape to heaven and allow his story to be told by a white narrator.

As the moral center of Tell Me a Tale, Moses becomes the compass by which actions are judged within the world of the novel. Although Moses acts in ways that would confirm the worst fears of Stowe's audience, he accomplishes what McEachin's audience wants him to: securing justice for the nameless millions who have been mistreated and murdered by a white society that, one hundred fifty years later, still refuses to completely and honestly own up to its history and the stories it tells about that history. This emphasis on telling the truth evokes the words of Frederick Douglass. In his Narrative, Douglass recalls a slave by the name of Demby who was killed by a white man. He writes, "Mr. Gore then, without consultation or deliberation with any one, not even giving Demby an additional call, raised his musket to his face, taking deadly aim at his standing victim, and in an instant poor Demby was no more. His mangled body sank out of sight, and blood and brains marked the water where he had stood" (52). Demby's murder was not recognized as a "truth" in the

society in which Douglass lived, however. Because Mr. Gore was a white man, "[h]is horrid crime was not even submitted to judicial investigation. It was committed in the presence of slaves, and they of course could neither institute a suit, nor testify against him; and thus the guilty perpetrator of one of the bloodiest and most foul murders goes unwhipped of justice, and uncensured by the community in which he lives" (52). Douglass's point is apt: African Americans were not allowed to tell the truth, and many white Americans refused to. Douglass's Narrative becomes, in effect, his testimony in the court of public opinion, since he could not testify in a court of law. McEachin, too, forces white readers to reconsider the "truths" that have been told about slavery. He pushes white readers to ethically imagine the effect that slavery and its legacy has had on black Americans. McEachin's and Butler's novels are alike in this respect: both authors force readers to rethink the ways in which they consider the past. While Butler asks black readers to recognize that they cannot historically imagine a past that they did not experience and therefore cannot know and should not judge, McEachin pushes white readers to reconsider the ethics of the stories that they have told and continue to tell about themselves and their past.

Like Stowe, McEachin incorporates religion in his novel, although it is not nearly as pervasive as the Christianity that infuses Uncle Tom's Cabin. Readers learn immediately that McEachin has placed God on Moses's side. As the seventeen-year-old trudges toward Red Springs, he begins to worry that all his years of planning will be for naught. He worries, "But what if they were not there? They had to be. What if they were there and had repented?" His concern passes quickly, however, and he decides that "God would not punish him in such a fashion. They were there, and they had not repented. He would push on" (4). It is fitting, of

course, that the novel's Moses delivers judgment on the white citizens of Red Springs. His Biblical namesake, after all, delivers God's law and frees the Israelites by escaping through the Red Sea:

> And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey [. . .] and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. (King James Version, Exod. 3.7-10)

McEachin makes the connection between his Moses and the Moses in the Bible explicit. As he considers his plan to confront the Red Springers, Moses considers the word he has been thinking about for a long time: deserving. "'Deserving,' he always concluded, belonged right up there with the Ten Commandments. Moses himself would have approved" (5). Just as the Egyptians were deserving of the fate God dealt them, so Moses believes that the men of Red Springs are deserving of retribution for their refusal to acknowledge the consequences of their actions.

Moses has long served as an important figure in several religious traditions, and Moses has been and continues to be especially important in African American culture. According to Robert Beckford:

> The Exodus story is of fundamental importance to black people, because within it we find a group of people who are enslaved and suffering from both

> economic and political bondage as well as, at times, genocide and infanticide. They call upon God to help, and what God does is respond by liberating them, crushing their oppressors and leading them into freedom. (qtd. in "Moses," 6)

This Biblical tale of God punishing slaveholders resonated with American slaves. "African-Americans, who were literally enslaved in the Land of the Free," Jonathan Kirsch notes in Moses: A Life, "enshrined Moses in their folk culture as well as their churches: 'Go down, Moses' can be seen as one of the earliest anthems of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States" (4). McEachin makes use of this depiction of Moses as a freedom fighter and also incorporates "Go Down, Moses" as an anthem throughout the novel. In response to Archy's frequent requests that Ben sing for him, Ben croons:

> *Go down, Mo'ses,*
>
> *Way down in*
>
> *Egyp'lan'*. . . .
>
> *Tell ol' pharaoh*
>
> *To let*
>
> *My peeple go*. . . . (55, author's emphasis)

When Ben finishes singing, Archy responds, "An' I let 'em go, didn't I, Ben?" Ben affirms, "Yes, suh, Mr. Archy" (55). In this way, "Go Down, Moses" not only evokes a connection between Moses and the Bible but also demonstrates the way in which whites so often make racial issues about themselves. In White, Richard Dyer worries that "[w]riting about whiteness gives white people the go-ahead to write and talk about what in any case we have always talked about: ourselves" (10). White Americans continue to tell themselves the

stories—often untrue stories—of their white pasts and neglect to tell the stories of the non-white Americans who have also shaped the past. In this case, Archy interprets a song about the relationship between God and Moses to be about how he himself freed his slaves. It does not matter to him that he had brutalized his slaves for years, or that many of them may have continued to struggle and suffer after their emancipation; Archy cares only about receiving credit for his perceived benevolence.

Although Archy demonstrates the white tendency to put himself at the center of every story he tells, McEachin is careful to avoid creating Ben and Archy as binaries. Archy is an ex-slave holder, but he does eventually recognize his biracial son and plan to build a future for him. Likewise, Ben has been a faithful servant and father figure to Moses, but readers learn that he withheld his help from Charlotte during Moses's birth, resulting in her death. Neither Ben nor Archy is a complete embodiment of good or evil, and neither can be relegated to a simplified role of villain or saint. In the narrator's description of the Fayetteville Market House, McEachin explicitly reminds readers not to idealize those who were enslaved: "All had not been saints. There were thieves, bandits, plundered, warriors, spear-makers, devil worshippers, errant witch doctors, abusers, and all levels of the wicked and nefarious" (138). McEachin situates his novel within Friedman's concept of "relational narratives in which the agonistic struggle between victim and victimizer is significantly complicated." He refuses to simplify slavery and instead creates a complicated ethical dynamic between Ben and Archy, as well as between these two characters and readers.

In addition to creating a connection between his novel and the Bible, McEachin also pays tribute to a major character in slave fiction with the character of Archibald McBride. Archy's namesake comes from Richard Hildreth's 1836 novel The Slave, or Memoirs of

Archy Moore. Readers of The Slave "learn that Archy is the offspring of a Virginia aristocrat and Revolutionary War hero, Colonel Moore, and his beautiful slave mistress. Though born a slave, Archy is white in color" (Brandstadter 161-62). McEachin creates Archy McBride to be the converse of Archy Moore; while Moore is the slave child of a white owner, McBride is the white father of a slave child. Still, the two novels' purposes are closely interwoven. Hildreth's novel begins with a direct address to the reader, "Ye who would know what evils man can inflict upon his fellow without reluctance, hesitation, or regret; ye who would learn the limit of human endurance, and with what bitter anguish and indignant hate, the heart may swell, and yet not burst, peruse these Memoirs!" (1). Archy Moore, the narrator of his own story, lets readers know his goal:

> [S]hould I be able, through the triple steel with which the love of money and the lust of domination has encircled it, to reach one bosom—let the story of my wrongs summon up, in the mind of a single oppressor, the dark and dreaded images of his own misdeeds, and teach his conscience how to torture him with the picture of himself, and I shall be content. Next to the tears and the exultations of the emancipated, the remorse of tyrants is the choicest offering upon the altar of liberty! (1-2)

As chapter one, aptly titled "My Object in Writing," ends, Moore hopes that his memoirs will convince one who has not yet been hardened by slavery to fight for the rights of humanity. But if that person does not appear, Moore foresees that another kind of being will respond to the injustice of slavery: "Come!—lest if thy coming be delayed, there come in thy place, he who will be at once, DELIVERER and AVENGER!" (3). McEachin, in foreshadowing the doom to which Jensen refers, also responds to Hildreth in creating the

character of Moses as an avenger and deliverer. Hildreth recognizes the importance of history and the stories we tell about that history, and his novel predicts what McEachin's novel demonstrates: if white Americans do not address the wrongs of slavery in time, retribution will be inevitable. McEachin also seems to be suggesting that Americans rethink the story they tell about slave literature itself; although Uncle Tom's Cabin is recognized as the first piece of slave literature, it was actually Hildreth's novel that came first. More importantly, in McEachin's eyes, Hildreth's novel is a more viable model than Stowe's, especially for twentieth-century readers.

Archy McBride represents the opportunity white people have to reconsider the stories that are told about American history. In the novel, Archy freed his slaves, albeit several years after the Emancipation Proclamation (76). When Archy's slaves were called to the house for the announcement that they were free, "[s]ome thought a speech was in order. Others thought a ceremony of some sort." They waited for Archy to tell them:

> I, as a slaver, was wrong. *We*, as slavers of over four million of God's children, were wrong, and saying, too, that a nation that condoned the institution, a nation that was founded on the principles of equality and justness, abandoned decency and ignored its covenant, was wrong. On behalf of that nation, my people, and myself, I offer my apology. (79-80, author's emphasis)

"But," McEachin tells readers, "Mr. Archy never said any of that. In fact," the narration continues, "Mr. Archy never even came out on the porch that day. He sent Ben back out. The simple message his man-servant delivered was ever so quiet. 'Mr. Archy said y'all free'" (80).

McEachin cleverly creates a discrepancy between what readers expect and what they are given. Readers are happily satisfied with Archy's apology to his slaves but then are quickly forced to realize that his apology is imaginary. They are left almost as disappointed and angry as Archy's slaves would have been. Readers are put into the shoes of the slaves who do not hear what they want and need—what they deserve—to hear. McEachin demonstrates the incongruity between the stories that are actually told and those for which people hope. By neglecting to apologize to his former slaves, Archy fails to "tell the truth." Instead, he reminisces every time he hears "Go Down, Moses," and congratulates himself for "lettin' 'em go."

The disappointing tale McEachin tells of Archy's slaves being freed provides a stark contrast to the idealistic picture that Stowe paints in the prototypical antislavery tale, Uncle Tom's Cabin. In an eloquent address, George Shelby not only celebrates the emancipation of his father's slaves but also welcomes them to stay on his family's land. George calls the servants to the house and tells them:

> "My good friends," said George, as soon as he could get a silence, "there'll be no need for you to leave me. [. . .] But, you are now free men and free women. I shall pay you wages for your work, such as we shall agree on. The advantage is, that in case of my getting in debt, or dying,—things that might happen,—you cannot now be taken up and sold. I expect to carry on the estate, and to teach you what, perhaps, it will take you some time to learn,—how to use the rights I give you as free men and women. I expect you to be good, and willing to learn; and I trust in God that I shall be faithful, and

> willing to teach. And now, my friends, look up, and thank God for the blessing of freedom." (379-80)

By creating such a striking dissonance between the ways George Shelby's and Archy's slaves are freed, McEachin drives home the realization that the hopes of the abolitionists did not come true. Although Archy belatedly made the morally just decision to free his slaves, he could not give them what they truly needed, what Hildreth refers to as "the remorse of tyrants." Of course, Stowe does not offer an apology to slaves, either. George Shelby, though he ceremoniously frees his father's servants, never apologizes. The only hint of remorse comes in the scene that McEachin's slaves imagine.

The lack of remorse that white society, including the government, demonstrated for their involvement in slavery is one reason for the racial friction that continues in the United States today. As noted by Norrell, two prominent examples of racial discord in the U. S. are the trials that involved Rodney King and O. J. Simpson. These notorious trials were rooted in issues of race and consequently pitted black and white Americans against each other. King was a black motorist pulled over and then severely beaten by white Los Angeles police officers who claimed they believed King was "an ex-con on PCP." A nearby resident who was awoken by the commotion captured the brutal attack on video and delivered it to a local television station. Within 24 hours, CNN had picked up the footage and was running it practically non-stop (Linder, "Trials"). Because of the already antagonistic conditions between whites and blacks, race became one of the most talked about aspects of the case, especially once audio tapes of one of the police officers became public. In them, Officer Laurence Powell refers to African Americans involved in a domestic dispute "as right out of 'Gorillas in the Mist'" and says of his part in apprehending King, "I haven't beaten anyone

this bad in a long time," (qtd. in Linder, "Excerpts"). Defense attorneys for the white policemen argued that King was resisting and even lunging at officers, and that the officers correctly followed their protocol for escalation of force; attorneys for King claimed that he was following police orders and that the movement the officers interpreted as lunging was an effort to escape their blows. Even some of the white police officers present testified that they did not see grounds for the amount of force used in bringing King down, yet the all-white jury believed that King had acted so erratically that the officers had no choice but to use force against him. All four officers were acquitted.

The stories told about the beating of King differed depending on who was doing the telling. Three days after the incident, The New York Times mentioned in passing that race might have played a part in King's beating. The Times reported on March 6, 1991, in the innocuously titled article "Videotape Appears to Show Police Beating" that "Ramona Ripston of the American Civil Liberties Union suggested that racism might have played a part in the incident. Mr. King is black. The police did not release the identities or races of the officers." By the next day, the Times had begun focusing largely on the racial aspect of the incident. The March 7 article, tellingly titled "Tape of Beating by Police Revives Charges of Racism," begins with an explicit emphasis on race: "A two-minute amateur videotape of the beating of a black motorist by a group of police officers has jarred Los Angeles and revived charges that the police department has failed to confront an alleged pattern of police brutality and official abuse of minorities among its officers" (Mydans). Ronald N. Jacobs views the media attention afforded the King incident as substantial in that it portrays the way Americans—different groups of Americans—viewed the situation. He writes, "A focus on which events are selected by a community for narration (and which events are not selected)

provides important clues about how that community understands the past, present, and future" (1244). Jacobs's assertion is similar to Jensen's: "It matters whether we tell the truth about what happened centuries ago, and it matters whether we tell the truth about more recent history." Essentially, the stories Americans tell themselves become the "truth," but those stories are constructed in different ways for different people. Jacobs discusses the ways different groups narrated the King incident in "Civil Society and Crisis: Culture, Discourse, and the Rodney King Beating." In his study of the media coverage of the King incident by the Los Angeles Times, a mainstream newspaper, and the Los Angeles Sentinel, an African American newspaper, he found that "[i]n the Los Angeles Times it was constructed as a problem of police brutality, of factionalism, and of political divisiveness. In the Los Angeles Sentinel it was constructed as a problem of police brutality, of white insincerity, and of the need for African-American empowerment" (1266). The differences in the stories told about the beating of King were in part due to the fact that "[w]hile it was constructed in the Los Angeles Times as the beginning of a narrative of crisis, in the Los Angeles Sentinel it was inserted into the middle of an ongoing narrative about civil rights and police brutality" (1266). White Americans tended to see King's beating as a solitary event; African Americans, meanwhile, viewed it as another example of the violence that had been perpetrated on blacks for centuries.

Within hours of the not guilty verdict, black citizens of Los Angeles, convinced that the officers were acquitted because they were white—and King was black—had erupted into rioting that lasted four days. Sadly, even the media coverage of the rioting was created to make blacks look like savages against innocent white victims. Despite the fact that "[s]even hundred Korean shopkeepers had their businesses destroyed" (Norrell 318) and that "fifty-

four people (mostly Koreans and Latinos) were dead" (Linder, "Trials"), the media focused largely on Reginald Denny, a white truck driver who was pulled from his cab and beaten nearly to death by a group of young black men. George J. Sanchez writes in "Reading Reginald Denny: The Politics of Whiteness in the Late Twentieth Century":

> The dramatic image of the fallen Denny, a white victim of black rage, signified for many the mayhem of the worst modern race riot in U.S. history. The power of this representation is especially revealing because Denny was one of only two white people attacked at that intersection. Over thirty other people were assaulted, and their sufferings were duly videotaped. However, the rest of the victims were Asian or Latino. (388)

Sanchez's point is apt: in choosing which story of the riots to tell, Americans clung to the story neither of the murdered Koreans and Latinos nor of the rioters themselves, but that of Denny.

Another real-life case that proved ethically complex was the criminal trial of O. J. Simpson. Just a few years after the King beating and subsequent riots, the "trial of the century" got underway in another Los Angeles courtroom. This time, black defendant Orenthal James Simpson was accused of killing his white ex-wife and her white friend, Ron Goldman. The fact that Nicole Brown Simpson was white factored into news stories almost immediately. Only two days after the murder, a June 14, 1994, Los Angles Times article quoted one of Nicole's neighbors who described her: "She's blonde, she's tanned, she's absolutely beautiful" (Meyer and Malnic). Two weeks later, on June 28, the Times began focusing even more directly on the racial division of the case. The Times reported that "African Americans [were] almost twice as likely as whites to sympathize with the black

sports star. Seventy-four percent of the African American respondents said they were either 'very' or 'somewhat' sympathetic toward Simpson, compared to 38% of whites and 50% of Latinos" (Colvin).

After 133 tedious days of trial, it took the mostly-black jury only three hours to acquit Simpson of the murders (Linder, "Trial of Orenthal James Simpson"). A Gallup poll conducted a couple of days after the verdict showed that 78% of African Americans polled believed the jury had produced the appropriate verdict, while only 42% of white Americans agreed (Linder, "O. J. Simpson Trial"). This racial gap in the perceived justice of the trial can be attributed to the varying stories about the case that were told by black and white Americans. According to Norrell, "To most white observers, the evidence pointing to Simpson's guilt was overwhelming. Most African Americans believed in his innocence, convinced that the Los Angeles police had planted evidence to convict him" (318-19). Often, Norrell explains, blacks felt enormous distrust for police officers:

> [B]lack jurors sometimes "nullified" the criminal prosecution of a black defendant, despite "belief beyond a reasonable doubt" that the defendant was guilty. Blacks continued to feel "a solidarity" against the police and the criminal justice system based on generations of white-supremacist treatment, and that was manifest in the way they rallied to Simpson. (319)

Just as Jacobs illustrated that the King beating, for African Americans, "was inserted into the middle of an ongoing narrative about civil rights and police brutality," the Simpson trial was viewed by many black Americans as just one more case of an African American "criminal" being accused of violence against a white "victim." Daniel Petrocelli, who represented Ron Goldman's family in the subsequent civil suit against Simpson, noted that "there was no

doubt that to the black population, the trial of O.J. Simpson hinged on a far larger issue than whether or not he killed two people. What was at stake to so many African Americans was the history of prejudice, discrimination, mistreatment, and abuse with which they alone were intimate" (341). In addition to the differing stories being told by white and black Americans, the media also made choices regarding which stories to tell. Armond White notes, "You've noticed the media doesn't keep asserting that brutal cops exonerated from manslaughter trials or celebrity criminal Oliver North are guilty; the press is selective in its commitment to 'truth'" (341).

Such was the state of affairs in American race relations when McEachin penned Tell Me a Tale. Interestingly, in a 2006 interview, King summed up his feelings about the night he was beaten by saying, "It made me feel like I was back in slavery days" ("15 Years Later"). It seems appropriate, then, that McEachin chose a story about an ex-slave to address these contemporary issues. Tell Me a Tale delivers the justice that many Americans felt was being denied them in the early 1990s. As Kindred was informed by the Black Power Movement, whose leaders often told stories that denigrated the generations of blacks who had preceded them, McEachin's work is informed by the trials and riots that took place in the 1990s. Appropriately, there are also two trials that take place within the novel. The first, in language that mimics an actual trial, is that of Archibald McBride, who was sentenced and executed by a jury of fellow white Red Springs citizens in a court of their own. When two of the Red Springers returned from Fayetteville with news that Archy's property had been deeded to his illegitimate, biracial son, it did not take long for them to gather their friends and spread the word. McEachin writes, "Before daybreak, they were holding court" (219), and just a short time later, the men were on their way to Archy's property:

> The wagon thundered all the way into the yard, and with the last strips already in place, McMillan passed the matches back to the cane hobbler, who in turn fashioned a torch and fired up the missiles. J. D. was the first to heave his, and it landed with telling accuracy. The bedroom window splintered, and in an instant the room lit up. (226)

Moses had risen early and walked to the creek that day, daydreaming of his future working the plantation with his father and uncle. By the time he heard the explosion and ran back to Ben's shack, the fire had consumed the tiny dwelling, and Moses could not get inside to save his sleeping father and uncle.

The Red Springers condemn Archy because he "done turn't all'a that prop'tee over to that black young'un a'his" (219). But the men are also angry with Archy because of the relationship that Archy had with Moses's mother, Charlotte, a slave on Archy's plantation. Archy loved Charlotte more than he loved his white wife Mildred, which is evidenced by the two women's graves:

> One of the headstones was somewhat well attended with a patch of flowers that sprouted from its base and boasted the inscription, *CHARLOTTE—MY LOVE*; the other had been totally neglected. The small inscription read: *MILDRED R. I. P.* And it seemed as if someone had had second thoughts about the "R. I. P." because the lettering had been prankishly defaced. (44)

The white men of Red Springs were not above raping black women, but they could not tolerate a white man showing affection for a slave, not even after her death. Silas states, in reference to Archy's love of Charlotte, "I ain' never seen a man so crazy 'bout a black

woman in all m'life" (35). In a heated conversation with Archy, the Red Springers explicitly blame Archy's relationship with Charlotte for his wife Mildred's death:

> "'Member that black heifer that drove y'out'cha mind?" Cruddup got closer.
>
> "An' drove Mildred to committin' suicide?" J. D. said.
>
> "Y'poor ol' wife, Mildred," Silas picked up. "A white woman. Gone. D'ceased. Pois'oned by her own self."
>
> "That's somethin' else agin you, Archy," Okra said, trying to emulate Silas. (75).

This hostility over interracial relationships reminds contemporary readers of the racial issues raised during the O. J. Simpson trial. According to White, "Taboo explains it all" (353). White argues in "Eye, the Jury" that it was O. J. and Nicole's relationship as a black-white couple that spurred the media frenzy surrounding the case:

> If not for the mixed-race element of the Simpson-Brown marriage, the murder case might have been investigated and news of it broadcast unexceptionally. [. . .] Simpson plainly was on trial for more than murder—for audacity, rebellion, the sexual rights he claimed as an American citizen and an American victor. His race, held against him in the mind-blowing way only the white establishment knows, overwhelmed the rationality of the law and most media officials. (353)

Just as O. J. may have been, at least in part, on trial for his relationship with a white woman, in McEachin's novel, Archy is on trial for his relationship with a black woman and their biracial son. It does not matter to the citizens of Red Springs that slavery is over, nor are

they swayed by the "rationality" that Moses's inheritance of Archy's land will not materially affect them. McEachin, like White, seems to be commenting on the absurdity of reactions to the "taboo" of biracial relationships. These men fail to imagine the ethical consequences of their actions and, through their burning of Ben's shack, demonstrate to white readers that failure to accept responsibility for our actions kills not only Ben, a representation of the black community, but also Archy, a symbol of the white community.

Killing Ben and Archy is also symbolic of killing off the dream of Reconstruction. Eric Foner notes in Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877 that "the driving force of Radical ideology was the utopian vision of a nation whose citizens enjoyed equality of civil and political rights, secured by a powerful and beneficent national state" (230). Archy ultimately recognizes that he needs to own up to his son because it is the right thing to do, and he cannot imagine what he is going to say when he finally meets his Maker if he does not set things right (193). Archy decides that he and Ben can work together to benefit Moses, that they "can start doin' right for right's sake—not for forgiveness, but because it's right." He tells Ben his plan: "If we really want to do some good for th' last few sunsets, let's do it for th' boy. We can build this place up for 'im. We can build this place up for 'im so's he can one day be one'a the biggest suppliers in all'a North Carolina—maybe the whole South. [. . .] I know what I gotta do. And I'm gonna do it" (194-95). Ben, Archy, and Moses working together to farm the land would have been a microcosm of Radical Reconstruction, but the white men of Red Springs destroyed Archy's story of an alternative future in which whites and blacks could interact in successful cooperation.

The second trial in Tell Me a Tale is that of the Red Springers who torched Archy's property and killed the men inside. Although Dana's response to enslavement in Kindred

rejects the belief system of a character like Uncle Tom, it is Moses who presents the most radical answer to the slave's ethical dilemma. Not only does Moses kill the whites who persecuted him but he does so several years after the Civil War has ended slavery, when the only purpose the murders might serve is revenge. His life is no longer in danger, his freedom is not being withheld, and yet there is such a tangible cruelty—and such a fierce unwillingness to accept a new tale of their past—that remains in these four white men that revenge does ultimately seem to be the morally justified response. Moses's tale serves as the evidence in this case, and when he finishes his story, he gives the accused a chance to repent. They refuse to show remorse, however. Only when they are deemed "*deserving*" does Moses leave them to die (237, author's emphasis). His is not a misguided hate, but neither is it reined in by Christian virtues, or even by secular principles of morality. Yet, within the framework of the literature, Moses's actions are justifiable and even understandable. James Gilligan notes in Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes, "The first lesson that tragedy teaches (and that morality plays miss) is that *all violence is an attempt to achieve justice*, or what the violent person perceives as justice, for himself or for whomever it is on whose behalf he is being violent" (10, author's emphasis). So while Moses's actions are violent, it is through his violence that he endeavors to find the justice he believes has eluded him.

Moses's reaction to the unremorseful men of Red Springs echoes the reaction that many African Americans had to the verdict in the Rodney King trial. When the four white officers who had beaten King were acquitted, the attitude among many blacks was that justice had been trumped by race. According to Petrocelli, "The race riots triggered by the Rodney King verdict had been extremely disturbing and unsettling, unleashing a frightening breakdown of law, order, and civility. People in Los Angeles and throughout the country

blamed the legal system" (52). Petrocelli views the riots—not the beating of King or the acquittal of the police officers—as the "breakdown of law, order, and civility," emphasizing again that one's view of history depends on which story one decides to tell. When the white men responsible for beating King were acquitted, the citizens of Los Angeles reacted violently, as does Moses, in their quest for justice. Although a violent reaction may seem the antithesis of justice, Gilligan that violence and justice go hand-in-hand. He writes, "Crime and punishment are conventionally spoken of as if they were opposites, yet both are committed in the name of morality and justice, and both use violence as the means by which to attain those ends. So not only are their ends identical, so are their means" (19). Read in this light, the actions of the Los Angeles rioters is understandable; the ethical problem is that those punished by the riots were not, by and large, the white community responsible for the injustice that the black community experienced.

McEachin also ensures that his white readers will condone Moses's violence because the guilty white characters are given a chance to redeem themselves. Again, McEachin creates a strong parallel between the trial of the Red Springs men and that of the police officers who beat King. When asked by a prosecutor, "In watching the videotape now is it your testimony that every one of the blows that you see on there is a justified use of force[?]," defendant Sergeant Stacey Koon replied, "It's a reasonable and necessary [use of] the minimum force, yes, sir that is my testimony" (Linder, "Excerpts"). Later, when Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates apologized for his officers' mistreatment of King, his backhanded apology did nothing to soothe racial tension in Los Angeles: "In spite of the fact that he's on parole and a convicted robber, I'd be glad to apologize" (qtd. in Kramer 1).

McEachin's white characters similarly miss out on their opportunity to show remorse for their actions. When Moses's story of Red Springs is complete, Moses addresses the accused:

> "I want to be right. I want to be absolutely certain. You *would* create history all over again? There is no question about it? I mean, in the story—you were not as good as you could'a, and far worse than you should'a. People died. Loves were lost. A life was ruined. The good was never allowed to grow. And that doesn't concern you in the least?" (237, author's emphasis)

Their response—"Not in the slightest"—seals their fate (237).

According to McEachin, Tell Me a Tale began as a screenplay ("Re: Thank you!") but was never made into a movie "because of the stupidity of wanting me to change the ending, which, obviously I refused to do" (E-mail to the author). The truth is that the stories Americans tell often come from Hollywood's version of the "truth," which is meant to leave white audiences feeling proud of their historical "accomplishments." Robyn Wiegman argues in "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity":

> [I]n the commodified circuits of contemporary identity production, white disaffiliation takes shape as "liberal whiteness," a color-blind moral sameness whose reinvestment in "America" rehabilitates the national narrative of democratic progress in the aftermath of social dissent and crisis. Such liberal whiteness currently dominates the popular imaginary in narratives that feature whites as the soldiers of civil rights (such as the films Mississippi Burning and A Time to Kill, or the TV production of Fences), in spectacular fantasies of a postracist U.S.-based new world order (Independence Day), in sentimental renderings of cross-racial relations (Boys on the Side), and in

> filmic celebrations of fundamental white male goodness (Forrest Gump). (121)

Wiegman's claim explains why few stories about slavery have made it into the world of popular culture. Amistad, Steven Spielberg's 1997 film, is a notable exception. Other films, such as Gone with the Wind (1939), Glory (1989), and Gladiator (2000) have incorporated slavery but have skirted the issues that make contemporary audiences uncomfortable. Gone with the Wind is perhaps the best example of popular culture ignoring slavery altogether, in that, in a world where men and women are bought and sold, the film concerns itself with the troubles of a spoiled white woman. Glory does less of a disservice to the individuals who were once enslaved in this country, but its focus is not on slavery, per se, but on a company of black volunteers fighting in the Civil War. Gladiator, perhaps the most successful of recent films about slavery, focuses on slavery in the Roman Empire, starring white actor Russell Crowe as the enslaved protagonist, and thus skirts issues of race altogether. In instances where slavery is addressed directly, popular culture requires that black characters be aided by benevolent whites. It is a team of white lawyers who wins the freedom of the enslaved Africans who staged a revolt aboard their slave ship in Amistad, it is Tom and Huck who "rescue" Jim in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and it is a white officer who leads the black company into battle in Glory. From this sampling, it seems that the majority of American audiences are only comfortable with issues of slavery and racism when whites are portrayed in helpful roles, as if to assuage the everlasting guilt white Americans assume for their ancestors' role in slavery and the privilege of whiteness they continue to gain from it.

McEachin's novel lacks the helpful whites that apparently make slave stories acceptable to the American public. McEachin reworked his screenplay into a novel rather than rewrite the story to be acceptable in mainstream American culture. Instead of allowing America's collective white conscience to be eased, Tell Me a Tale attempts to accomplish for its audience what American culture in its most popular forms does not: it allows its black character to define and execute justice without needing to be helped by whites. McEachin says of Hollywood's discomfort with his novel's ending, "It seems that most didn't like the idea of the boy getting away with what he had done. I've always thought that the ending was [. . .] a matter of poetic and heartfelt justice" ("Re: The End of Tell Me a Tale"). Quite simply, McEachin was unwilling to allow Hollywood to change the "truth" of his story.

McEachin clearly locates the narrative's ethical power and contemporary lesson in the death of the Red Springs men, which explains his fierce and ethical unwillingness to "change the ending" or tell a different, Hollywood-ized tale. McEachin urges white readers to picture themselves in Moses's place and, consequently, to ethically imagine the effects that slavery and its legacy have had on black and white Americans. When white readers realize that Moses can only achieve justice by killing the white men of Red Springs, they are a step closer to recognizing that they must also accept their own compliance in the state of race relations today. "The record is there for all to read," James Baldwin insists. "One wishes that Americans—white Americans—would read, for their own sakes, this record and stop defending themselves against it. Only then will they be able to change their lives" (320-21). Although the white men of Red Springs are literally poisoned by Moses, the implication is that they—and many of McEachin's white readers—are "poisoned by their own selves," just as Mildred was, by the stories they tell. Baldwin sees the power in stories and the ways in

which stories can destroy their tellers. In "White Man's Guilt," he writes that "people who imagine that history flatters them (as it does, indeed, since they wrote it) are impaled on their history like a butterfly on a pin and become incapable of seeing or changing themselves, or the world" (321). The tales that whites continue to tell have rendered them incapable of seeing themselves as they truly are.

If readers are not willing to take a stand against hate and injustice—if they are not willing to accept ethical responsibility for their racial wrongdoing—then they must acknowledge that they are not dissimilar from the men of Red Springs. In Kindred, Butler pushes black readers to historically imagine slavery as it really was, and to give credit to their black ancestors for the courage it took merely to survive slavery and life in pre-Civil Rights America. McEachin urges white readers especially to rethink the stories they tell about themselves and their history, and to recognize that telling the truth is an ethical responsibility. McEachin tells white readers that they must accept responsibility for the past and demonstrate that they want things to be different moving forward. He reminds them of Stowe's message that slavery is not only detrimental to those enslaved, but that it is also ruinous to slave masters, as evidenced by the tragic deaths of Mildred, Archy, and the white men of Red Springs. Likewise, it is not only blacks who have suffered as a result of the racial tension and violence that has gripped our nation. Racism and injustice plague everyone with whom they come in contact. The stories white Americans tell and pass down through the generations continue to poison whites and blacks alike.

Although Moses succeeds in carrying out his plan—he has told his story and killed the white men he holds responsible for murdering his family and ruining his life—McEachin implicitly critiques Moses for his decision to kill. McEachin sets up his critique early in the

novel when Moses is on his way to Red Springs and wonders whether the white men may have repented. Moses worries, "But what if they were not there? They had to be. What if they were there and had repented? God would not punish him in such a fashion. They were there, and they had not repented" (4). McEachin's Moses wants to fulfill Hildreth's role of "deliverer and avenger." This is unlike the Biblical Moses, who would have been relieved had the Egyptians repented for their sins against the Israelites, and it is also contrary to Stowe's Uncle Tom, who urges Legree, "O, Mas'r! don't bring this great sin on your soul! [. . .] Do the worst you can, my troubles'll be over soon; but, if ye don't repent, yours won't *never* end!" (358, author's emphasis).

Butler forces Dana to live with the consequences of killing Rufus; likewise, McEachin refuses to reward Moses for his act of revenge. Once the Red Springers are dead, Moses sits on the back step of the store:

> Now it was midnight. The rain had stopped, but the Red Springs air was still heavy with moisture. His suit, which had not completely dried in the store, was back with that wet heaviness. The frail young man was coughing more and more, and it seemed that the dampness had penetrated his skin and pained his ribs to such an extent that it slowed movement. He was tired, very tired. (247)

It is clear to readers that Moses has pneumonia, as Silas has already hinted. The novel ends with Moses placing a letter he has written at the base of the headstones of his father, Uncle Benny, and Sweet Elsie Pratt, another victim of the citizens of Red Springs. The novel's final solitary image of Moses reminds readers of all colors that everyone will end up alone if a way to bridge the growing gap between races cannot be found:

> And so on a morning that had not quite decided whether to sparkle with brilliance or bestow its grayness, the boy pushed up a dampened collar and moved on. His movements were slow. Very slow.
>
> He did not have the mule.
>
> He was all alone. (252)

Moses has become Hildreth's predicted avenger by killing the white men of Red Springs. More importantly however, is how he fulfills his role as deliverer. The Biblical Moses delivers the Israelites into the Promised Land. But what McEachin's Moses delivers is much more important to contemporary readers. What Moses delivers is his tale.

McEachin pushes white readers to reconsider the stories that they have told and continue to tell about themselves and their past. Moreover, he insists that white Americans must begin, as Jensen asserts, to "tell the truth" and that to refuse to do so will have ethical consequences for the whole country. Telling the truth is of vital importance, according to Jensen, because it is the only thing that can protect the country from being "doomed":

> That isn't meant hyperbolically: I mean doomed. I mean that a society with such inequality at so many levels is unsustainable. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to the sense of urgency in this struggle the night before he was assassinated. On April 3, 1968, in Memphis, he warned that "if something isn't done, and in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed."

> There is no way to chart a path forward to avoid that fate without being honest about the facts of our past. We also must be honest about the emotions of the present. (44)

Despite the urgency of the warnings from Jensen and McEachin, however, the United States continues to avoid confronting racial issues in the hope that they will go away. Many whites refuse to see that they must necessarily acknowledge the past before racial tension can be alleviated, and this unwillingness to "tell the truth" makes it increasingly difficult to move forward.

In some instances, Americans are beginning to tell the truth about what has happened in the past. Most notably, perhaps, is the trial and conviction of Byron De La Beckwith in 1994. Beckwith had been charged with the murder of Civil Rights activist Medgar Evers in 1963, but despite hard evidence, Beckwith's fingerprint on the murder weapon for example, two white juries had failed to convict him in 1964. According to Maryanne Vollers, author of Ghosts of Mississippi: The Murder of Medgar Evers, the Trials of Byron De La Beckwith, and the Haunting of the New South, the District Attorney's office decided not to try Beckwith a third time unless new evidence was discovered (208). By 1990 that evidence had surfaced, largely in the form of witnesses who were willing to testify that in the years since the first trials, Beckwith had bragged to them about killing Evers (Vollers 356-58). In his closing address, Prosecutor Bobby DeLaughter told the jury, "This kind of murder . . . there is just a gaping wound laid open in society. We have to learn from the past, folks. Where justice is never fulfilled . . . all it does is just fester and fester over the years." He continued, "Is it ever too late to do the right thing? For the sake of truth and justice, I hope it's not" (qtd. in Nossiter 257). McEachin's novel parallels this real-life truth

telling and the white men of Red Springs, like Beckwith, never demonstrate "the remorse of tyrants." Unfortunately, the killing of Medgar Evers was only one of many crimes against black citizens and telling the truth about his murder, while a step in the right direction, does not give justice to the countless others who died. During the first trial of Beckwith, another black man, Louis Allen, was shot at his front gate after he had witnessed the murder of NAACP worker Herbert Lee and was willing to testify against the white assassin. No one was ever charged in the murders of Allen or Lee. According to a 2007 interview with John Brittain, chief counsel for the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, "The Southern Poverty Law Center reports over 75 persons who have been forgotten [black victims of white violence]. Some put the list over 150" ("Delayed Justice"). When it comes to telling the truth and issuing justice, Americans still have a long way to go.

The unwillingness of white Americans to accept responsibility and tell the truth about the past is further evidenced by the United States government's continuous refusal to make reparations to the descendants of slaves. Eric J. Miller, Assistant Professor of Law at St. Louis University, was asked by the House Judiciary Committee to testify at a hearing on the Legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. In his 2007 testimony, Miller supports reparations for African Americans and argues that reparations is about making an "investment" in the future of the country. He explains:

> Reparations is much more than, and on occasion unconcerned with, monetary restitution. When not phrased in purely monetary terms, reparations offers an opportunity to explore our shared history to determine our mutual investment in each other. It seeks to trace and account for past behavior, and resists specifying in advance what sorts of resitution [sic] are

> appropriate, and from whom. At bottom, reparations seeks to develop a more accurate understanding of the story of race in America. It adopts an open-minded approach to the American past as well as the American present, while questioning which accounts of that past and present are open to challenge and reconfiguration.

Until Americans embrace the "mutual investment" that Miller sees as essential to the country's racial harmony and as an ethical necessity, the U.S. will continue to be poisoned by the tension and violence that were highlighted by the Rodney King and O.J. Simpson trials of the 1990s. Americans, McEachin insists, must learn to tell a new tale.

CONCLUSION

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

—William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun

Reactions to enslavement in the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Octavia E. Butler's Kindred, and James McEachin's Tell Me a Tale: A Novel of the Old South span the moral continuum. On one end of the spectrum, Stowe's Tom refuses to react with violence, even when an act of violence could result in his freedom. On the opposite end of the spectrum, McEachin's Moses returns to Red Springs to kill men who no longer pose any threat to him, when the only purpose the murders might serve is revenge. In the middle of the moral continuum, Butler's Dana refuses to physically resist her enslavement until she kills in self-defense. Each of the three novels I have examined portrays the slave's moral responsibility differently, but perhaps most fascinating about the moral continuum that these works explore is how, depending on one's ethical perspective, the moral spectrum is interchangeable. To some, Tom is more moral than Dana or Moses because he refuses to commit violence; others see Tom as the least moral because the violence he rejects could have secured the freedom of his fellow slaves. Is it more moral to fight against enslavement, even if that means killing a master and perhaps endangering other slaves? Or is it more ethically responsible to accept and make the best of slavery, not succumbing to it, but choosing to endure enslavement rather than to commit the evil necessary to free oneself or others?

As William Faulkner writes, "The past is never dead" (92), and the ethical decisions made by the generations of Americans—slaves as well as masters, and the descendants of both—who preceded us continue to shape our smallest individual actions, as well as the national politics and policies that shape how white and non-white Americans interact. The 2008 Presidential Election is forcing Americans to begin confronting the harsh realities that racial disharmony and inequality have created over the past 389 years. At the time of this writing, three presidential hopefuls remain in the race for the White House: presumptive Republican nominee John McCain and Democratic hopefuls Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. There are those Americans who are not ready to see either a woman or an African American as Commander in Chief; others worry that Senator Obama is not "black enough" to effect any real change for African Americans. Throughout his campaign, Senator Obama has had to walk a tightrope, careful not to alienate white supporters while at the same time aware that catering to whites will render him a proverbial "Uncle Tom" in the eyes of some black voters. Senator Obama has himself tried to call attention to the racial tension that still pervades American culture, but he insists that dwelling on animosity is not going to solve the problems that all Americans face. In a March 2008 speech, Senator Obama addresses controversial statements made by his pastor and urges Americans to recognize that racial divisiveness hurts everyone:

> [R]ace is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America—to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality.
>
> The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that

> have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through—a part of our union that we have yet to perfect. And if we walk away now, if we simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care, or education, or the need to find good jobs for every American.

Senator Obama's speech demonstrates that Americans continue "to simplify and stereotype" in the ways that Butler critiques in Kindred. Additionally, his words reiterate McEachin's message that Americans must learn to tell the truth and move forward as a nation.

Obviously, many Americans have still not accepted the challenge of rethinking our history and the stories we tell about that history. I have attempted with this project to address the ethical decisions we have made in the past and that we continue to make on a daily basis. For my own part, working on this project has broadened my understanding of the "complexities of race in this country" that Senator Obama describes, and it is my hope that this exploration of the works of Stowe, Butler, and McEachin will encourage further reflection on "the moral law within." After all, the "moral law" Kant reflects upon "with increasing admiration and awe" is found not only within individuals but also within nations.

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