

The Vile Wretch in Petticoats

****The Vile Wretch in Petticoats, The Demon of Unrest****

In Washington, South Carolina's congress representatives found a new source of anger beyond abolitionist petitions when the *National Era*, an antislavery newspaper, published the serialized novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe on June 5, 1851. The portrayal of slavery in this novel incited outrage. The narrative begins in a Kentucky dining parlor, where two men, including one named Haley, a slave trader, plot to purchase a slave named Tom. The novel's portrayal of the brutal realities of slavery, including the violent behavior of Simon Legree, who beats and ultimately kills Tom, struck a nerve with many readers.

The book's completion on April 1, 1852, gained over fifty thousand eager readers, establishing Stowe as a literary sensation in the North. However, the Southern response was immediate and severe. Louisa McCord and other Southern essayists condemned it as misconstrued and fanatical. The prospect of owning or reading the book quickly became dangerous in the South, as it affronted the region's honor by attacking slavery's perceived virtues. The reaction was particularly intense because Stowe was a woman, intensifying misogynistic attitudes among her critics.

In retaliation, Southern writers launched numerous proslavery novels, contorting themes from Stowe's work. Authors like Charles Jacobs Peterson and the writer of *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* crafted narratives that blamed the effects of slavery on Northern abolitionists, rather than the institution itself. Despite the organized responses, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold an astounding three hundred thousand copies within three months, affirming Northern perceptions of slavery as cruel.

Ultimately, the Southern perspective, entrenched in the belief that slavery fostered a benevolent society, clashed violently with Stowe's portrayal. They had no effective means to address the collective insult that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* posed to the South's honor. Resentment grew, signaling a deeper conflict—one that foreshadowed the mounting pressures leading to the Civil War. It was not yet full-blown hatred, but the seeds of conflict were being sown.