

Mary Henderson Eastman (1818–1887), like many Southerners, was appalled by Harriet Beecher Stowe's powerful use of vivid images and sentimentality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Doc. 11.2). She published *Aunt Phillis's Cabin: or, Southern Life as It Is* as a reaction to Stowe's book. In the following passage, Southerner Arthur Weston discusses slavery with Abel Johnson, a fellow student at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

“Now,” said Abel, “having a couple of particularly good cigars, where did we leave off?”

“It's too warm for argument,” said Arthur, watching the curling of the gray smoke as it ascended.

“We need not argue,” said Abel; “I want to catechize you.”

“Begin.”

“Do you think that the African slave-trade can be defended?”

"No, assuredly not."

"Well," said Abel, "how can you defend your right to hold slaves as property in the United States?"

"Abel," said Arthur, "when a Yankee begins to question there is no reason to suppose he ever intends to stop. I shall answer your queries from the views of Governor Hammond, of Carolina. They are at least worthy of consideration. What right have you New England people to the farms you are now holding?"

"The right of owning them," said Abel.

"From whom did you get them?" asked Arthur.

"Our fathers."

"And how did they get them?"

"From the Red men, their original owners."

"Well," said Arthur, "we all know how these transactions were conducted all over the country. We wanted the lands of the Red men, and we took them. Some were treated with injustice. They were driven off, slaughtered, and taken as slaves. Now, God as clearly gave these lands to the Red men as he gave life and freedom to the African. Both have been unjustly taken away."

"But," said Abel, "we hold property in land, you in the bodies and souls of men."

"Granted," said Arthur; "but we have as good a right to our *property* as you to yours—we each inherit it from our fathers. You must know that slaves were recognized as *property* under the constitution. John Q. Adams, speaking of the protection extended to the peculiar interests of the South, makes these remarks: 'Protected by the advantage of representation on this floor, protected by the stipulation in the constitution for the recovery of fugitive slaves, protected by the guarantee in the constitution to the owners of this *species of property*, against domestic violence.' It was considered in England as any other kind of commerce; so that you cannot deny our right to consider them as property now, as well as then."

"But can you advocate the enslaving of your fellow man?" said Abel.

"No," said Arthur, "if you put the question in that manner; but if you come to the point, and ask me if I can conscientiously hold in bondage slaves in the South, I say yes, without the slightest hesitation. I'll tell you why. You must agree with me, if the Bible allow slavery there is no sin in it. Now, the Bible does allow it. You must read those letters of Governor Hammond to Clarkson, the English Abolitionist. The tenth commandment, your mother taught you, no doubt: 'thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his *man-servant*, nor his *maid-servant*, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.' These are the words of God, and as such, should be obeyed strictly. In the most solemn manner, the man-servant and the maid-servant are considered the *property* of thy neighbor. Generally the word is rendered slave. This command includes all classes of servants; there is the Hebrew-brother, who shall go out in the seventh year, and the hired-servant, and those 'purchased from

the heathen round about,' who were to be bondmen forever. In Leviticus, speaking of the 'bondmen of the heathen which shall be round about,' God says, 'And ye shall take them for an inheritance, for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen forever.' I consider that God permitted slavery when he made laws for the master and the slave, therefore I am justified in holding slaves. In the times of our Saviour, when slavery existed in its worst form, it was regarded as one of the conditions of human society; it is evident Abolition was not shadowed forth by Christ or his apostles. 'Do unto all men as ye would have them do unto you,' is a general command, inducing charity and kindness among all classes of men; and does not authorize interference with the established customs of society. If, according to this precept of Christ, I am obliged to manumit [free] my slaves, you are equally forced to purchase them. If I were a slave, I would have my master free me; if you were a slave, and your owner would not give you freedom, you would have some rich man to buy you. From the early ages of the world, there existed the poor and the rich, the master and the slave.

"It would be far better for the Southern slaves, if our institution, as regards them, were left to 'gradual mitigation and decay, which time *may* bring about. The course of the Abolitionists, while it does nothing to destroy this institution, greatly adds to its hardships.' Tell me that 'man-stealing' is a sin, and I will agree with you, and will insist that the Abolitionists are guilty of it. In my opinion, those who consider slavery a sin, challenge the truth of the Bible.

"Besides, Abel," continued Arthur, "what right have you to interfere? Your Northern States abolished slavery when it was their interest to do so: let us do the same. In the meantime, consider the condition of these dirty vagabonds, these free blacks, who are begging from me every time I go into the street. I met one the other day, who had a most lamentable state of things to report. He had rheumatism, and a cough, and he spit blood, and he had no tobacco, and he was hungry, and he had the toothache. I gave him twenty-five cents as a sort of panacea, and advised him to travel South and get a good master. He took the money, but not the advice."

Mary Henderson Eastman, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin: or, Southern Life as It Is* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, Grambo, 1852), 132-135.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

- Identify:** According to Abel, how does the Bible justify slaveholding?
- Analyze:** Why does Abel acknowledge the theft of land from the Native Americans at the beginning of this passage?
- Evaluate:** Find three ways in which Abel's argument counters St. Clare's from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Doc. 11.2). How does each argument support the beliefs of each book's author?