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TEACHING DEMOCRACY WEBINAR SERIES

Who is a Citizen?

July 18, 2012

Primary Sources Selected by
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Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 24-26.

which America draws her lineage, and on *her* the Queen of it. Though all the thrones be shaken, may *hers*, founded deep in the hearts of her subjects, be established to her and *to her children*, through all generations!

With deep respect,

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

BRUNSWICK, ME., March 20, 1852.

Her letter to Charles Dickens and his reply are as follows:—

TO THE AUTHOR OF "DAVID COPPERFIELD":

The Author of the following sketches offers them to your notice as the first writer in our day who turned the attention of the high to the joys and sorrows of the lowly. In searching out and embellishing the forlorn, the despised, the lonely, the neglected and forgotten, lies the true mission which you have performed for the world. There is a moral bearing in it that far outweighs the amusement of a passing hour. If I may hope to do only something like the same, for a class equally ignored and despised by the fastidious and refined of my country, I shall be happy.

Yours very truly,

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

TAVISTOCK HOUSE, LONDON, July 17, 1852.

DEAR MADAM,—I have read your book with the deepest interest and sympathy, and admire, more than I can express to you, both the generous feeling which inspired it, and the admirable power with which it is executed.

If I might suggest a fault in what has so charmed me, it would be that you go too far and seek to prove too much. The wrongs and atrocities of slavery are, God knows! case enough. I doubt there being any warrant for making out the African race to be a great race, or for supposing the future destinies of the world to lie in that direction; and I think this extreme championship likely to repel some useful sympathy and support.

Your book is worthy of any head and any heart that ever inspired a book. I am much your debtor, and I thank you most fervently and sincerely.

CHARLES DICKENS

MRS. HARRIET B. STOWE

The following is the letter addressed to Macaulay, and his reply:—

HON. T. B. MACAULAY:

One of the most vivid recollections of my early life is the enthusiasm excited by reading your review of Milton, an enthusiasm deepened as I followed successively your writings as they appeared. A desire to hold some communion with minds that have strongly swayed and controlled our own is, I believe, natural to every one, and suggested to my mind the idea of presenting to you this work. When a child between eight and ten years of age, I was a diligent reader of the "Christian Observer," and in particular of the articles in which the great battle was fought against the slave-trade. An impression was then made on my mind which will never be obliterated. A similar conflict is now convulsing this nation,—an agitation which every successive year serves to deepen and widen. In this conflict the wise and good of *other lands* can materially aid us.

The *public sentiment of Christianized humanity* is the last court of appeal in which the cause of a helpless race is to be tried, and nothing operates more sensibly on this country than the temperate and just expression of the sentiments of distinguished men in your own. Every such expression is a shot which strikes the citadel. There is a public sentiment on this subject in England which often expresses itself in a way which does far less good than it might if those who expressed it had a more accurate knowledge and a more skilful touch, and yet even that has done good, though it has done harm also. The public sentiment of nations is rising to be a power stronger than that of fleets and armies, and it needs to be skilfully and wisely guided. He who should direct the feelings of England on this subject wisely and effectively might do a work worthy of your father, of Clarkson and Wilberforce, and all those brave men who began the great conflict for God and humanity.

I much misjudge your mind and heart if the subject is one on which you can be indifferent, or can speak otherwise than justly, humanely, and effectively.

Yours with deep respect,
HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

BRUNSWICK, ME., March 20, 1852.

THE ALBANY, LONDON, May 20, 1852.

MADAM,—I sincerely thank you for the volumes which you have done me the honor to send me. I have read them—I cannot say with pleasure; for no work on such a subject can

give pleasure, but with high respect for the talents and for the benevolence of the writer.

I have the honor to be, madam,

Your most faithful servant,

T. B. MACAULAY

In October of 1856 Macaulay wrote to Mrs. Stowe:—

"I have just returned from Italy, where your fame seems to throw that of all other writers into the shade. There is no place where 'Uncle Tom' (transformed into 'Il Zio Tom') is not to be found. By this time I have no doubt he has 'Dred' for a companion."

Soon after Macaulay's letter came to her, Mrs. Stowe began to receive letters from other distinguished persons expressing a far warmer sympathy with the spirit and motive of her work.

FROM LORD CARLISLE

LONDON, July 8, 1852

MADAM,—I have allowed some time to elapse before I thanked you for the great honor and kindness you did me in sending to me from yourself a copy of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." I thought it due to the subject of which I perceived that it treated not to send a mere acknowledgment, as I confess from a motive of policy I am apt to do upon the first arrival of a book. I therefore determined to read before I wrote.

Having thus read, it is not in the stiff and conventional form of compliment, still less in the technical language of criticism, that I am about to speak of your work. I return my deep and solemn thanks to Almighty God, who has led and enabled you to write such a book. I do feel, indeed, the most thorough assurance that, in his good Providence, such a book cannot have been written in vain. I have long felt that Slavery is by far the *topping* question of the world and age we live in, including all that is most thrilling in heroism and most touching in distress,—in short, the real Epic of the Universe. The self-interest of the parties most nearly concerned on the one hand, the apathy and ignorance of unconcerned observers on the other, have left these august pretensions to drop very much out of sight, and hence my rejoicing that a writer has appeared who will be read and must be