Racism in Children’s Literature through Uncle Tom’s Cabin

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Introduction

Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the landmark abolitionist novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe, was published in 1852. Quickly, unauthorized versions targeted to children entered the market.

Methods

Utilizing the Nesbitt and Curtis Collection, I was able to gather an array of materials pertaining to Uncle Tom’s Cabin and its associated works for children. I worked through each work, making pertinent notes.

Results

• Over fifty works pertaining to Uncle Tom’s Cabin
• Most works struggle to tell the story of slavery to young children, and create racist propaganda in the process.
• Young Folks Uncle Tom’s Cabin features a binary cover- the angelic white child versus the troublesome black child. Ends with Uncle Tom living due to the compassion of his original slave master who rescues him.
• Timeline JS created of Pitt works

Discussion

An often-neglected incubator of hateful messages is children’s literature, where blatant misrepresentation or, more commonly, a lack of depiction at all, convey racist attitudes to America’s most vulnerable population: its children. Children’s literature has largely remained stagnant with depictions of African-Americans still transmitting altered historical narratives. After all, if children of color cannot find themselves in stories, doesn’t it communicate to them on their value in society?

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