



Harriet Beecher Stowe

Joan D. Hedrick

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"Up to this year I have always felt that I had no particular call to meddle with this subject.... But I feel now that the time is come when even a woman or a child who can speak a word for freedom and humanity is bound to speak." Thus did Harriet Beecher Stowe announce her decision to begin work on what would become one of the most influential novels ever written. The subject she had hesitated to "meddle with" was slavery, and the novel, of course, was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Still debated today for its portrayal of African Americans and its unresolved place in the literary canon, Stowe's best-known work was first published in weekly installments from June 5, 1851 to April 1, 1852. It caused such a stir in both the North and South, and even in Great Britain, that when Stowe met President Lincoln in 1862 he is said to have greeted her with the words, "So you are the little woman who wrote the book that created this great war!" In this landmark book, the first full-scale biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe in over fifty years, Joan D. Hedrick tells the absorbing story of this gifted, complex, and contradictory woman. Hedrick takes readers into the multi-layered world of nineteenth-century morals and mores, exploring the influence of then-popular ideas of "true womanhood" on Stowe's upbringing as a member of the outspoken Beecher clan, and her eventful life as a writer and shaper of public opinion who was also a mother of seven. It offers a lively record of the flourishing parlor societies that launched and sustained Stowe throughout the 44 years of her career, and the harsh physical realities that governed so many women's lives. The epidemics, high infant mortality, and often disastrous medical practices of the day are portrayed in moving detail, against the backdrop of western expansion, the great social upheaval accompanying the abolitionist movement, and the entry of women into public life. Here are Stowe's public triumphs, both before and after the Civil War, and t

Harriet Beecher Stowe Details

Date : Published June 1st 1995 by Oxford University Press, USA (first published January 13th 1994)

ISBN : 9780195096392

Author : Joan D. Hedrick

Format : Paperback 544 pages

Genre : Biography, History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History

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From Reader Review Harriet Beecher Stowe for online ebook

J L Kruse says

This Pulitzer Prize winning book is a must have for anyone interested in the Civil War, nineteenth century literature, women's rights, the lifestyle of settling the Western frontier, the influence of the British Aristocracy on American popular culture, and it could very easily be titled "How Harriet Works" (h/t to James Wood).

Harriet Beecher Stowe's life before and after writing "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was rich and intense, full of great pain and great joy, and Hedrick captures it in factual storytelling that is both compelling and restrained, and thankfully devoid of the sentimentality that is present in previous Stowe biographies. She puts important moments of Stowe's life, such as losing her young son in a cholera epidemic in Cincinnati, in an historical context that allows the reader a personal glimpse into her motivation as an artist and as an activist. Hedrick also handles dicier questions of intimate, same-sex friendships in a way that places them firmly in nineteenth century social mores, without portraying them as anything more or less than what they were.

If I have one critique of this marvelous text it is that Hedrick did not spend as much time as she might have done on Stowe's career in the late 1860's. That being said, the chapters she does devote to this time period are exemplary, specifically the chapter on "Woman's Rights and Woman's Wrongs", which is an excellent introduction to the split in the Universal Suffrage movement and the birth of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's and Susan B. Anthony's National Woman Suffrage Association.

An additional note for fellow Stowe researchers: read the footnotes in this book. Hedrick spent years working with the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center's archives while doing the research for her manuscript, and these footnotes are an invaluable guide to extant documents chronicling Stowe's life.

Entertaining, absorbing and wholly engaging, one need not be an historian or researcher to enjoy this work: it is the story of a life of a woman writer, told in a series of consecutive moments lived in a time of transformative change, a life that left an indelible impact that ultimately made our country more humane and just.

Vincent Lombardo says

An intellectual and literary biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe written by an academic for academics. This book is not for the general reader, unless you want to learn everything about Harriet Beecher Stowe, her family, and the 19th century feminist movement. It is too long, too detailed (too many long excerpts from letters and sources), has too much historical analysis and not enough storytelling. The author goes off on many tangents and should have stuck closer to Stowe. I slogged through this book and I did learn some things, but I did not enjoy reading this book one bit. A shorter biography would have suited me better.

Laura says

American women's history, biography

Kate says

A solid biography that does a fine job of setting Harriet Beecher Stowe's life and work in context. It left me wanting to read more of Stowe's work (selectively, mind you! Hedrick's commentary gives a good indication of which of Stowe's books are still worth a look and which are not), more about the times, and more about various of the fascinating people who figured in her life (in particular, a couple of her siblings, and a number of the writers with whom she was associated).

Gianna says

I read this when I was younger, and I loved it very much. The story was inspiring and reminded me of Little House on the Prairie and Caddie Woodlawn. Also, reading about Harriet Beecher taught me how one book--one story--one person can have on the world. Her book, Uncle Tom's Cabin, was one of the tipping points for the Civil War.

Heather says

"In her advice to troubled and grieving women, Stowe's efforts were repeatedly focused on removing from their shoulders the added burden of feeling that they should not feel the way they did, a burden that was largely the result of Calvinist preaching by male ministers. 'The things I said to you in parting,' she wrote to Martha Wetherill, 'I said hoping perhaps they might have at least some influence in relieving your good heart of a burden which our dear father never meant us to carry--the awful burden of thinking that every person who does not believe certain things and is not regenerated in a certain way in this life is lost forever.' Women turned to Stowe for relief from a particular kind of religious scruple that they would not have been able to express to their ministers....Stowe answered this mother's cry in a book she thought of as a series of 'household sermons.' ...Isabella Beecher Hooker, who often turned to her sister for advice on matters maternal and religious, summed up Harriet's pastoral style: 'She...has no temptation to form or to adhere to theories merely--& she has the largest charity'(283)".

Sara says

1995 pulitzer-biography

Claudia says

Thorough but dry, dry, dry.

Robshelton365 says

Excellent biography.

Carol says

Not an easy read! It was very long, dense, slow read but I discovered that I was drawn to her life and determination to accomplish so much at a time when women had no voice. Connecticut born Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) was one of the first women to make a living from her writing despite maintaining her domestic duties. Her big seller, Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly, was the best-selling novel of the 19th century (selling 3,000 copies the first year, 1852.) Her book is credited with helping fuel the abolitionist cause in the 1850s. Pulitzer Prize winner.
