After conducting initial research through an independent study focusing on black superheroes with Professor Muther during the Spring semester of 2015, I became curious about black identity in literature and the implications of those portrayals. For my summer research, I wanted to explore the history of black culture more broadly and intensively under the supervision of Professor Chakkalakal, with whom I had taken two courses also in the Spring semester.

Looking at George M. Frederickson’s now classic, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (1971) and Henry Louis Gates, Jr’s, *Figures in black* (1987) as a foundation for understanding perceptions of blacks during the antebellum period. Through their research I was able to formulate my own hypothesis, concluding that black culture derived from slave culture. It was through authors, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, who helped to inscribe what now goes by the name of slave culture that we begin to understand the difference between black and white characters.

Her most famous novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), though an anti-slavery novel, can be viewed as supporting proslavery conceptions of black people. Stowe attempts to allay white fear towards black people, particularly slaves, allowing whites the opportunity to see blacks as less threatening to white society. Moreover, her fiction gave her white readers, particularly white female readers, the opportunity to see how blacks could enhance American society. This enhancement could be achieved either by integrating blacks into the United States or by creating separate black states. By doing so, Stowe suggests that blacks have innate qualities, such as loyalty, devotion, and honesty, which whites do not, arguing that these qualities are derived from their experience of slavery, which is the focus of her antislavery fiction.

In her less well-known second antislavery novel, *Dred* (1856), Stowe creates a community, comprised exclusively of runaway slaves who live independently of whites. Stowe suggests that a racially integrated United States would not be sustainable. She argues that with an integrated nation, slave culture, particular to blacks would be lost. Furthermore she suggests that whites would become too dependent on blacks, or vice versa, which she sees as a detriment to the United States. So she imagines what a separate community for blacks would look like in her novel. Through her novels, Stowe constructed a model black figure, as well as a model black state which constitutes the particularity of her antislavery argument. By doing so, Stowe establishes a foundation for what later becomes black culture, one that would ally the natural fear whites held toward blacks, but also allow blacks the freedom to gain social and financial mobility.

Besides conducting research, I was able to refine my writing and critical thinking skills. With the guidance of Professor Chakkalakal, I was able to develop the necessary skills to become a more critical reader, who can produce an accurate literary analysis of complex texts.

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