GUEST EDITORS' OVERVIEW

In one of the Civil War's many bromides, President Abraham Lincoln and the writer Harriet Beecher Stowe met at the Executive Mansion in November 1862. Although the account may be apocryphal, Lincoln is supposed to have remarked that Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had started the great battle. Lincoln's early and erstwhile view of causation may be questioned, but his elevation of Stowe's novel was understandable. Hundreds of thousands of copies flooded the free states, and the melodramatic plot undoubtedly persuaded countless readers of slavery's evils. Yet, while the novel is one of the best-known publications of the nineteenth century, only academic specialists recall that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* first appeared in serial form in the newspaper the *National Era.* The novel's initial appearance in a periodical, soon followed by a triumphant book publication that spurred live performances and illustrations, reminds us of the richness and power of print culture in the Civil War era.

By the 1850s, a national print culture had formed, evinced by the fact that white Southern readers reacted so angrily after reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* sparking a backlash of proslavery novels like Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854). The intersectional literary exchange was hardly limited to the fury over Stowe's abolitionist novel. In fact, Southern readers admired standard Northern writers like Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper, while literary magazines from Richmond to Boston reviewed a wide range of scientific, political, literary, and religious books published elsewhere in the country. The network of print stretched intricately and widely across the Mason-Dixon line and brought eastern writings to the farthest reaches of the Pacific West. By the eve of the Civil War, subscribers in small towns in Florida and California could receive familiar Northern magazines like *Harper's* or the *Atlantic Monthly.* Booksellers were prevalent in all cities and towns, where eager readers could purchase the latest works by William Gilmore Simms or Herman Melville.

Yet, in one of American history's greatest ironies, the creation of a national print culture in which books and periodicals spread through commercial networks and an increasingly sophisticated postal system did not result in collective understanding or unity of sentiment. On the contrary, the emergence of a national network of print exacerbated sectional hostilities so that in 1860 the country was at once more connected yet more sharply divided than ever.

New work on print culture, the tenor of which is captured by the essays in this special issue, has attempted to explicate the complicated ways novels and peri-

odicals shaped and were shaped by the turmoil of the war, the end of slavery, and the debates over the war's meaning. Studies by Eric Gardner, Trish Loughran, Derrick Spires, and others have greatly enriched our appreciation for the role of race, politics, slavery, gender, and other factors in mid-nineteenth-century print culture. The brief essays that follow build on these important studies by highlighting the periodical press's range, sophistication, and unflinching engagement with the nation's most pressing concerns.

The issue opens with Jim Casey's article, "'We Need a Press—a Press of Our Own': The Black Press beyond Abolition," a much-needed corrective to prevailing assumptions about Black editors' supposedly single-minded attention to abolition and their connection to white abolitionist journalism. Certainly, the Black press and its readers advocated slavery's immediate end. But they cared about other issues, too, as the recent booming success of the African American Intellectual History Society attests. Casey's article details the breadth of issues that engaged Black communities, including self-defense, education, and temperance. By highlighting the expansiveness of antebellum Black thought, Casey offers a fuller understanding of Black activism, a praxis that goes beyond a single issue. In so doing, he underscores an intellectual tradition that emerged before freedom.

Benjamin Fagan's article, "The Collective Making of *Frederick Douglass' Paper,*" examines a six-month period in which Douglass relinquished editorial control to a collective responsible for the paper's production. This case study reminds readers of the collaborative nature of Black newspaper production in general. *Douglass' Paper,* like many Black newspapers, "relied on . . . white allies and employees." By examining "specific work performed by specific people" Fagan explores not only the collective politics that informed the newspaper but also the complicated relationship between Black leadership and white allyship in the late antebellum era.

Rosalyn Narayan's exploration of racist humor in the antebellum Southern press serves as a hard and horrifying reminder of what Black people were up against. "Humor, Minstrelsy, and the Representation of African Americans in Macon's *Georgia Telegraph* and *Georgia Citizen,* 1855–1860" argues that to understand the power of hegemonic groups we must first understood how those groups articulated and disseminated a belief system that undergirded their agendas. Racist humor, Narayan shows, provided enslavers one such way to reach a broad constituency. The "humor," which relied on sight gags and easily digested wordplay, hammered home conceptions of Black inferiority, thus offering a justification for chattel slavery that transcended the ponderous disquisitions read in the halls of Congress and statehouses or published in learned journals. The "joke," Narayan ultimately argues, is as important as any other historical source that documents racist ideology.

In his article, "'The Gold of the Pen and the Steel of the Sword': The Unlikely

and Fleeting Celebrity of Theodore Winthrop," Timothy J. Williams turns our attention to the first year of the Civil War. Winthrop's novel *Cecil Dreeme* did not appear in the periodic press. It likely never would have been published at all had its author, a scion of a prominent New England family, not died at the 1861 Battle of Big Bethel, becoming one of the Union's first hero martyrs. As Williams demonstrates, however, the novel owes its success to promotion it received in the periodic press. His reading of the novel and of the contemporary commentary it received in newspapers and periodicals reveal the ways *Cecil Dreeme* presaged many of the issues that emerged during the war's first year.

Brigitte Fielder's study of Julia Collins's novel *The Curse of Caste; or, The Slave Bride,* serialized in the *Christian Recorder,* moves us to the war's final year, although, as Fielder notes, the war is conspicuously absent in this novel. Fielder's essay "Juno's Civil War: Black Knowledge and Racial Resolution in Julia Collins's *The Curse of Caste*" offers new ways to think about Civil War–era literature. Among other things, Collins's novel "reframes the war's metaphors of family to explicitly include Black people who are not genealogically related to white people." It thus disrupts the literary genres with which we are familiar, such as the "plantation romance," "race and reunion," and "the plantation gothic." That disruption gives us the freedom to move away from conventions that do not fit and to develop a reading that aligns with the novel's project.

Finally, Aston Gonzalez's essay "'Reading the Emancipation Proclamation': Viewing Race and Freedom during the Civil War Era" considers an 1864 engraving, *Reading the Emancipation Proclamation,* to think about slavery's legacy and the meaning of freedom. Gonzalez looks not only at the engraving but also at a cluster of business strategies, including circulation, marketing, and advertising plans, that reveal how the engraving's producers understood its appeal to various audiences. By appealing to the methodologies of print and visual culture, Gonzalez highlights how the written word and the image informed each other, pulled in different audiences, and promoted the goals of emancipation.

Ultimately, the new work presented here is intended merely to suggest the many possibilities for a more perfect union between Civil War studies and the analysis of print culture. Lincoln may or may not have slyly told Stowe that she had helped to start the war, but we can be certain that despite more than 150 years of Civil War historiography, numerous areas rich with analytical possibilities remain, including the vast and varied networks of print that found fertile fields in the imaginations of a nation torn asunder.

Sarah E. Gardner and Jonathan Daniel Wells
Guest Editors