

## On Resistance Strategy

- What is this thinker's/actor's approach to resisting slavery? Provide specific textual evidence—cite at least two concrete moments that demonstrate this approach.
  - In **Childhood**, Jacobs expresses how her upbringing allowed for a sense of humanity that was meant to be denied to her at her young age. Jacob's strong self-conception of self and humanity allowed her to better resist a system which attempted to strip her of her sense of self and humanity
    - "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away." (Jacobs 11)
    - "My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's Word: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.' But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor." (Jacobs 15-16)
  - In **the Trials of Girlhood** Jacobs states that her grandmother's standing as an important and well known figure within the town allowed her some protection from the assaults of Dr. Flint
    - "Her [Jacob's Grandmother] presence in the neighborhood was some protection to me. Though she had been a slave, Dr. Flint was afraid of her. He dreaded her scorching rebukes. Moreover, she was known and patronized by many people; and he did not wish to have his villany made public." (Jacobs 47)
  - In **the Jealous Mistress** Jacobs describes herself as staying in sight of others to avoid Dr. Flint so as to protect herself
    - "By managing to keep within sight of people, as much as possible, during the day time, I had hitherto succeeded in eluding my master [...] At night I slept by the side of my great aunt, where I felt safe. He was too prudent to come into her room." (Jacobs 51).
  - In **A Perilous Passage in the Slave Girl's Life**, Jacobs describes how Dr. Flint planned on building a house for Harriet Jacobs to live alone in, and to avoid this she became pregnant, and was able to live with her Grandmother
    - "I [Harriet Jacobs] will never go there. In a few months I shall be a mother." (Jacobs 87)
  - In **Continue Persecutions**, Dr. Flint tells Harriet Jacobs that he would free herself and her children in exchange for her living in a cottage and working for his family. She denies this offer, knowing that Dr. Flint would forge the papers granting herself and her children freedom, as well as having greater control over her due to her isolated position.

- “I knew that my master’s offer was a snare, and that if I entered it escape would be impossible. As for his promise, I knew him so well that I was sure if he gave me free papers, they would be so managed as to have no legal value.” (Jacobs 128)
- In **The Flight**, Jacobs escapes from the plantation.
  - “I raised the window very softly and jumped out. [...] I groped my way to the road, and rushed towards the town with almost lightning speed.” (Jacobs 146).
- In **The Children Sold**, Harriet Jacobs described how her children and brother were freed with the help of Mr. Sands and her uncle
  - “There [at the old farm house] the trader took the irons from William [...] My uncle procured a wagon and carried William and the children back to town” (Jacobs 162-163)
- In **The Loophole of Retreat**, Jacobs hides in the hidden attic of a shed at her grandmother’s house, allowing her to see her children despite still not being free.
  - “Having found the side next the street, where I could frequently see my children, I stuck the gimlet in and waited for evening. I bored three rows of holes, one above another; then I bored out the interstices between. I thus succeeded in making one hole about an inch long and an inch broad.” (Jacob 175)

### On Historical Constraints

- What constraints shaped this approach? Consider the historical, material, and social circumstances that made this strategy reasonable for this particular figure.
  - In **the Trials of Girlhood**, though her grandmother had more influence in the town, and Dr. Flint feared for his reputation which protected Harriet Jacobs, Jacobs would not have had any legal protection against Dr. Flint, and even if Dr. Flint’s reputation was harmed, no real aid could come to Harriet Jacobs due to her status as an enslaved woman.
  - In **the Jealous Mistress** though Jacobs is able to physically distance herself from Dr. Flint at times, this does not guarantee her safety, and also does not account for the mental distress that living under these conditions would have on a young girl. In addition, Mrs. Flint’s hostility increased Jacobs’s mental distress, and even increased the danger put unto her physically due to Mrs. Flint watching Harriet Jacobs in her sleep.
  - In **A Perilous Passage in the Slave Girl’s Life**, though Jacobs chose to be pregnant to avoid Dr. Flint’s attempt to force her to live alone in a house where she would not be able to avoid him, she was still forced to put her

body through an extremely damaging effort, especially considering she was only fifteen years old.

- In **Continued Persecutions**, though she did not agree to move into the cabin that Dr. Flint offered to her and his false promise of freedom, she was sent to the plantation Dr. Flint's daughter and son-in-law lived on.
- In **The Flight**, though she escaped Jacobs had to abandon her family so as to ensure their own safety as well as her own, for she knew that if anyone were to be culpable in her escape, her goal of her family gaining freedom would not come to fruition.
- In **The Loophole of Retreat**, though she was able to hide from Dr. Flint and mitigate the harm done to her children, she was still physically constrained for many years within the attic of the shed.

### On Strengths

- What does this approach allow them to accomplish or articulate? Identify the strengths and insights enabled by this particular strategy.
  - In *Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl* Harriet Jacobs not only tells her story of escaping enslavement aiding to disprove the idea that the account she told of her life was false, but also showed how slavery attempted to strip enslaved people of their humanity, as well as demonstrated how religion acted as a way for white enslavers to attempt to justify slavery through the use of scripture (this point especially comes up in **Childhood**). She also demonstrates that though having children can complicate routes to freedom (**The Flight** and **The Loophole of Retreat**), having a family does not define whether or not someone is able to fight for their own freedom, especially women.

### On Limitations

- What does this approach leave out or overlook? Analyze the genuine limits of this approach given the thinker's position and constraints.
  - *Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl* has an underlying tone of hope throughout, and though Harriet Jacobs states that she was fearful for her safety, she narrates the story as more optimistic than other counterparts. She herself states that she had an optimistic spirit by nature. This does not fully demonstrate the hopelessness that made it difficult for many to envision a future where they are free.