

When we focus on violence, we paint this narrative as a struggle between evil people and their victims. This portrays former slaves as having been helpless and desperate for their “good” white saviors in the north to free them. Harriet Jacobs was not helpless; she was intelligent and outsmarted her captors at every turn. She never let her guard down around white people not because she was too proud for their help, but because she recognized that it was smarter to be self-reliant in this situation. While she was certainly concerned about the potential violence she might face, her goal wasn’t to avoid violence but to gain her freedom through resistance. Therefore, focusing on resistance instead of violence pulls our attention away from the problem and towards the solution.

Today, this same struggle against racism is still very much a part of our society. Many people who think that black people in this time were helpless, passive and nonviolent in their struggle for freedom look at black people resisting racism today and decide that they’re being irrational, and that “if they really wanted our help, they wouldn’t be so awful to us.” This implies that a) modern struggle against racism is dependent on the “white saviors” of POC and b) black people are only deserving of equality when they submit. In reality, it has never been the case that black people were solely victims and never resisted.