

Sarah Cleveland  
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Advisor: Dr. April Langley  
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Revealing *Incidents*: Harriet Jacobs and the New Black Female Virtue

A “favorite slave...is not allowed to have any pride of character. It is deemed a crime in her to wish to be virtuous” (Jacobs 28). Essentially, Jacobs makes two critical points in the passage above: first, she identifies the slave woman’s experience as a foil to the white woman’s culture of respectability. Second, she observes that while Northern white women perpetuate their own concept of virtue, black women continually face factors that prevent their retention of virtue. In her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs recounts the intended suppression and destruction of her own virtue by her master Dr. Flint. Rather than submit to Dr. Flint’s demands, she subverts not only his authority as a male but also as her master, and at the same time she sacrifices her virginity to another man. She uses *Incidents* to advance a notion of nineteenth-century black female virtue as a counter to the white female Cult of True Womanhood. She offers her defiance of Dr. Flint’s sexual advances as the moment in which a slave becomes not only a woman, but a virtuous woman. She gives away what might be regarded as woman’s most precious gift, the ultimate sacrifice of her virginity, to take away the power of her master to rob her of what is only hers to give. Both symbolic and literal, this sacrificial act raises Jacobs from an unchaste and defiled object to a virtuous mother.

Jacobs becomes purified via her sacrificial acts--both virginal and bodily--and through her children. Moreover, her creation of black female<sup>1</sup> virtue redefines nineteenth-century female

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<sup>1</sup> Although “female” is a term that applies to all species (animals and humans) with particular racial connotations, for the purposes of this essay I use “female” to denote Jacobs’

sexuality in terms of positive moral traits that rely on sincerity and truth that are achievable through ethical actions as opposed to the reinforced adherence of physical chastity as the single indicator of a woman's virtue. Jacobs defines black female virtue as an expression of virtue more sincere than the Cult of True Womanhood's call for chastity as a woman's singular definition of purity. Jacobs' assertion of black female virtue relies on qualities such as honesty and courage, compassion and true love, calculation and self-control, selflessness, and patience and determination, as well as her role as mother and link to her children.

While scholars have for the most part explored the way in which Jacobs rearticulates, challenges, negotiates, or constructs womanhood and motherhood, I suggest that Jacobs moves beyond a mere redefinition or re-articulation of the Cult of True Womanhood. Instead, I maintain that Jacobs actually creates a new context within which female virtue can be considered. That is, she identifies virtue, rather than physical purity, as a term to be applied to women's moral qualities. Christina Accomando argues that Jacobs "reframes and rearticulates legal and cultural discourses of slavery and womanhood to uncover their fictive construction" (229). According to Accomando, Jacobs rearticulates slavery and womanhood by utilizing the legal dialogue of the time to reveal the way in which they both are fictively constructed. Emphasizing Jacobs' revision of the notion of women's relational identity, Kimberly Drake asserts that Jacobs represents the slave woman by stepping into the public sphere while emphasizing her "dependency and femininity" and also insisting that she "has the right to be free," and in this way she "revises the notion of women's relational identity" (96-97). While Accomando argues for Jacobs' unveiling of the fictional constructions of womanhood and position as a chattel. Thus, I further emphasize her autonomous construction of virtue in her transformation from a degraded object to a virtuous woman.

slavery, and Drake reasons for Jacobs' revised notion of women's relational identity, Sarah Emsley makes a claim for Jacobs' negotiation of sexual oppression. Emsley maintains that Jacobs uses language both as a veil and as a shield so that she thus "makes sexual oppression a negotiable subject in a political conversation about possibility" (161). Namely, she suggests that what Jacobs makes possible is the negotiation of her sexual oppression through her choice to "write a romantic version of her life," because this romanticized lens allows a space in which to "convey a political message" (160).

Moving beyond Emsley's view of what is possible in political possibility, Patricia D. Hopkins argues that Jacobs' narrative is vital for "exploring the violated black female body," and that this image must stand alongside raped white women or lynched black men in order then to "empower her beyond the image of victim" (5, 18-19). Stephanie Li likewise advocates for the notion of empowerment in Jacobs' text by maintaining that for Jacobs, motherhood is "a crucial form of female empowerment," rather than simply a trope or description of female slaves' sufferings (15). Jennifer Larson, however, maintains that Jacobs' narrative criticizes the Cult of True Womanhood's notions of purity and submissiveness and thereby challenges that nineteenth-century ideal (740). Stressing the abolitionist objective Jacobs achieves through the utilization of her sexual exploitation, Karen Sanchez-Eppler maintains that by "telling the story of her own sexual exploitation Jacobs enlists both the sexual responses of her readers and the threat of their similar sexual vulnerability for her own abolitionist purposes" (104). Likewise, Margaret Washington discusses Jacobs' utilization of her sexuality, but she focuses on the timely effect of Jacobs' narrative. Washington maintains that Jacobs aimed to draw on the sentiments of her readers in order to have "an impact at a crucial moment" in her people's history; furthermore, Jacobs took a "self-sacrificing plunge" when she revealed her sexual relationship with Mr. Sands

(61). Finally, Andrea Stone examines Jacobs' narrative as an example of the way in which rape complicates a slave's duality so that women "negotiated legal and literary conventions in their pursuit of legal subjectivity" (1). When a female slave's master initiated sexual relations with her, she then "posed [a] theoretical problem[s] within this particular power relationship" because "the boundary distinguishing the law's treatment of slaves as property and persons blurred" (65). Stone claims that by "exposing" the "gap[s] in [her] legal subjectivity," Jacobs "question[s] the legitimacy of the laws that bind" her (87-88). Questioning the legitimacy of the laws of slavery places Jacobs in a position of power, but I suggest an interpretation of her derivation of power that moves beyond its legal implications. Not only does she question her master's treatment of her, but she also offers an indictment of his immoral actions. This indictment reveals the outermost layer of her derivation of power, and within this layer and the ones following it she reveals the qualities necessary for her black female virtue.

While I agree that Jacobs certainly revises notions of motherhood and womanhood and utilizes her sexual oppression for its sentimental appeal to her readers, I maintain that her revision of motherhood and womanhood takes place within the space of her creation of black female virtue. Virtue, as defined in the Cult of True Womanhood through its call for chastity, was not available to Jacobs. Moreover, the Cult's call for submissiveness was not a notion to which Jacobs could conform since it would have compromised her integrity. As explained by Barbara Welter, the Cult of True Womanhood dictated that a woman be judged by society and her neighbors in terms of "four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity... Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes" (44). Moreover, while "religion or piety was the core of a woman's value," Welter maintains that "purity was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as unnatural and

unfeminine” (44, 46). These guidelines for a woman’s virtue seem to suggest that without one of the Cult’s pillars, a woman might not be perceived as a complete, true woman. For Jacobs, however, the notion of even attempting to be virtuous is “deemed a crime” (Jacobs 28). Rather than reconstruct the Cult’s virtues of purity and submissiveness that are either unavailable to her or attempt to betray her integrity, she creates a new black female virtue that relies upon the enactment of her own moral qualities.

Jacobs’ creation of black female virtue also suggests an empowering of women to use their minds, to embrace rather than reject the intellectual productions of their minds. Welter outlines the way in which a woman’s quest for piety was not to be deterred by even her intellectual interests: “Women were warned not to let their literary or intellectual pursuits take them away from God” (46). If a woman became too invested in her intellectuality, she risked ruining her piety. By faithfully pursuing her relationship with God, however, she sacrifices what Jacobs deems necessary for her own virtue: intellectual empowerment. In many of Jacobs’ incidents in her narrative, she confirms the value of black female virtue as located in her intellect. Her ability to outwit Dr. Flint takes not only courage and patience but also cunning, which requires an intellectual output that is exemplified by her rationality and a cognizance of her surroundings. By utilizing her intellect, Jacobs reverses this tenet of the Cult of True Womanhood and reframes her virtue around the necessity for an embrace of the intellectual production of the mind. Moreover, because she remains true to her own reason and intellect, Jacobs subtly reveals the insincerity of a Cult that requires women to forsake any literary or intellectual “pursuits” that might divert them away from their relationship with God. How could a woman be true or sincere if she denied her own necessity for literature that encouraged a higher

capacity of reasoning? For Jacobs, the greater her capacity is for reasoning, the greater her demonstration is of the qualities of her virtue.

An aspect of the Cult's pillars of virtue, sexual purity is essential to a woman's virtuous identity. This sexual purity, however, is not a trait that Jacobs can either sincerely or possibly promote. Her purity comes from a state of being unmixed with Dr. Flint, since her status as slave does not allow her to own her own body, let alone her chastity. According to Welter, a woman should maintain her purity: "all True Women were urged, in the strongest possible terms, to maintain their virtue, although men, being by nature more sensual than they, would try to assail it" (47). Furthermore, if "a woman managed to withstand man's assaults on her virtue, she demonstrated her superiority and her power over him" (48). Virtue, as a concept, relies upon a woman's sexual purity as well as her success and power over man in his attempt to attack it. While Jacobs does overcome Dr. Flint's attempts to take away her virginity and thus projects her power over him, her notion of power is complicated because she sacrifices her virginity to another man in order to defeat her master. Although she appears to fulfill the Cult's call for chastity by avoiding Dr. Flint's impending sexual violation, Jacobs actually reinforces her own interpretation of a more sincere virtue—one grounded in the reality of a slave woman's experiences. Her virtue and the notion of white women's virtue as chastity are separate terms since she creates her own virtue through ethical qualities of excellence that construct her moral identity—black, female, and virtuous—and also since her actions call for a more complex understanding of the term purity itself. Her concept of purity reveals itself as being driven by a more complex understanding of what it means to be undefiled, "unmixed," or free "from impurities, contaminants, or foreign matter" (*OED*). It is not only her body that she fights to protect in order to remain physically uncontaminated through her sexual act. It is also her mind,

heart, and spirit that she fearlessly guards. Because she does not mix in a physically sexual sense with her master, Jacobs maintains a sense of purity that relies upon its quality of being unmixed. However, in lieu of Dr. Flint's constant sexual advances, she cannot retain the Cult's call for chastity because if she were to submit to her master, she would sacrifice her chastity. As a woman in possession of true virtue, she retains a sincere control over her intellect and her morality.

Jacobs' avoidance of Dr. Flint's advances complicates her notion of power because she demonstrates her power over a man who legally owns her, and, even more significantly, she asserts her power, as a female, over her patriarch. She derives power from resisting Dr. Flint's physical advances which demonstrates a more complicated notion of power and highlights black female virtue. Specifically, her narrative reveals the multiple layers on which power operates in slavery. Namely, as a slave, she subverts her master's domination of her; as a female, she subverts a male's intended sexual domination of her; as a mother she subverts her domestic sphere; and finally, as property she subverts her economic sphere. Jacobs' status as slave serves as the outmost layer of her derivation of power because in the very first sentence of her narrative, she correlates her identity to her birth into slavery, stating, "I was born a slave" (9). Since she was "born" as a slave, she inherited her mother's condition. Before Jacobs begins to narrate the details of her life, she first identifies her inherited status as slave in order both to convey to the reader the outermost context in which she was forced to identify herself and also to provide the context for her virtuous acts. Within this context of her identity as a slave, Jacobs introduces her acts of virtue that include resisting rape and revealing crime and corruption on both a spiritual and secular level.

Through her explanation of her inherited status as slave, Jacobs provides a context for Dr. Flint's sexual advances, claiming that not only are they indicative of his corrupt nature but more significantly that they are also crimes. Diane N. Capitani maintains that in the nineteenth century "sexual violence against black women was not regarded as a crime in the South" (26). However, Jacobs states that "I cannot tell how much I suffered in the presence of these wrongs, nor how I am still pained by the retrospect" (Jacobs 27). She identifies Dr. Flint's actions as wrongs and furthermore claims that they have lasting implications that are quite painful. She also claims that slaves in her master's house "knew too well the guilty practices under that roof; and they were aware that to speak of them was an offense that never went unpunished" (27). By stating that Dr. Flint's verbal sexual abuse is wrong and also is a guilty practice, Jacobs defies the societal acceptance of black female slaves' sexual abuse that was not considered to be a crime. Her words, such as "suffered," "wrongs," "pained," and "guilty practices" reveal this defiance because she claims that her master's intended rape toward her, in addition to his other sexual abuses, is a crime. Moreover, she indicts Dr. Flint because she claims that his practices were "guilty," implying that he bares responsibility for his vulgar actions. Despite society's failure at sincere or moral reactions to such corruption, Jacobs demonstrates her knowledge and the power of her knowledge in her relationship with Dr. Flint. By indicting his actions, she specifically defines the sexual advances of Dr. Flint as guilty practices and asserts her power to accuse him as his slave. To go against the societal acceptance of female slave's sexual abuses was a bold, courageous act, but to indict her master's actions was also a bold, defiant claim to perpetuate. As a slave who attempts to operate in the most sincere and truthful manner and thereby convey her created virtue, Jacobs offers this trait—courage—as an identifier of her black female virtue.

Jacobs' repetition to her readers about the way in which Dr. Flint reminded her that she belonged to him signifies the way in which her abolitionist agenda works in conjunction with her creation of virtue. In chapter five Jacobs states that she was "his property" and remembers being reminded that "I belonged to him" (26-27). By repeating to the reader that she was told she was Dr. Flint's property, Jacobs employs the same rhetoric her master taught her in order to signify its lack of acknowledgement of her humanity. Since her readers are reminded that Jacobs was reminded of her status as property, they begin to question the connotations of her economic value. The more Jacobs repeats her status as property, the more it begins to signify her lack of humanity. Since Jacobs does not agree with her economic status but rather wishes to perpetuate her own humanity, she states that she wishes God's blessing on "those, every where, who are laboring to advance the cause of humanity" and that she desires to "kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage, suffering as I once suffered" (27-28). By attempting to convince her readers to question the slave's status as property, Jacobs both perpetuates her abolitionist agenda and establishes the context within which she enacts her virtue and its traits. Dr. Flint claims she is his property, but she works within this prescribed identity to create her own virtue, a task far more difficult for a woman in Jacobs' position than a white woman in a non-racialized position.

As her readers consider her humanity, Jacobs explicitly remarks on her own purity, which serves to highlight further her creation of virtue. She claims that Dr. Flint "tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled" and that she had a "light heart which nature had given me" (26-27). Not only was Jacobs conditioned by her grandmother to have pure principles, but she also claims that nature had given her a light heart, one which would not naturally have notions of evil in it. She did, then, have some semblance of purity to

which she clung during her master's evil advances. Moreover, she positions herself in the eyes of her readers so that the creation of her virtue is highlighted by yet an increasingly hostile environment and context. She has established that as a slave, she is the property of Dr. Flint, yet he constantly tries to assail the one part of her body, the gift of virginity, that she strives to protect. However, as his slave, she is commanded to submit to him and lose not only her virginity but with it any semblance of purity that nature had given her and her grandmother had taught her. By creating a new black female virtue, complete with its own set of morals, Jacobs illustrates for her readers the near impossibility with which she creates her virtue and the difficulty with which she perpetuates it.

Jacobs' discussion of the speed with which she is degraded by her beauty and skin color stands as another significant context that highlights the difficulty of her creation of virtue. She states, "No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death" (26). Regardless of the color of her skin, Jacobs, as well as other female slaves, would not be protected from Dr. Flint's advances. There is no law that stretches its "shadow" far enough to protect Jacobs, even from death. The protection that the law itself should offer seems to be portrayed as a dark entity, since Jacobs claims it has a "shadow," and this darkness does not even stretch to meet her, a slave. Moreover, she cannot rely on any single gradation of skin color to mark her beauty, unlike the white woman, who does rely on the fairness of her skin tone to determine her beauty. Thus, Jacobs' virtue does not rely on any single marker of skin tone. Namely, she defines her virtue through inward acts defined by moral and sincere qualities. Furthermore, she states about beauty: "If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the

degradation of the female slave” (26). Not only would fairer skin prevent Jacobs’ avoidance of her master, but her beauty would even hasten his advances. For her, the notions of skin color and beauty which are naturally beneficial to white women are inverted. She cannot rely on her beauty or skin color to provide any barrier of protection, so she must create her own means of protection. Her discussion of skin color, in conjunction with her maintenance of her purity, serves to establish the foundation for her new context of purity and creation of virtue, as compared to the Cult of True Womanhood’s context for purity. Jacobs’ context for purity does not rely on any physical markers of skin color to increase her likelihood to attain a good husband or appear more physically pure and clean. Rather, she relies on her inwardly sincere qualities to create her own context for purity and virtue. Even though she originally had pure principles, Dr. Flint was corrupting them, so she had to create a means of protection in order to create a new, more sincere context for her purity. This meant that she had to avoid sexually mixing with Dr. Flint so that she could still be pure--that is, unmixed--but she also had to sacrifice her virginity. By claiming that her fair skin color and beauty only increase her degradation, Jacobs demonstrates the need for her creation of virtue.

Jacobs’ claims that she tried her “utmost” to cling to the “pure principles [her] grandmother...instilled” in her reveals significant differences between her character and Dr. Flint’s (26). However, because of slavery she cannot fully subscribe to her grandmother’s standards of purity. Neither, is she able to follow those values imposed by the Cult of True Womanhood. Consequently, Jacobs’ narrative reveals the way in which she responds by constructing her own system of values, for black female virtue. She exemplifies honesty as one crucial element of black female virtue with the following confession. That is, Jacobs admits the level of indelicate images, sounds, and ideas with which Dr. Flint has infected her young spirit.

My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with indifference or contempt. The master's age, my extreme youth, and the fear that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this treatment for many months. He was a crafty man, and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes. Sometimes he had story, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought must surely subdue. Of the two, I preferred his stormy moods, although they left me trembling. He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master. I was compelled to live under the same roof with him--where I saw a man forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments of nature. (26)

She first confesses to the vulgarity that she acquires through Flint's corrupt remarks, his "foul words." She makes it clear that she is attempting to withstand gaining too much knowledge too soon in her young life. She realizes she is learning about things that she should not and is desperate to retain her innocence. Therefore, when she tells her readers that she "could not remain ignorant," we can see her struggle to retain an honest mind, to keep her thoughts pure in spite of the vulgar notions Dr. Flint relates to her (26). Next, she determines to resist contamination through "indifference or contempt" (26). That is, she openly refuses to admit she hears Dr. Flint's nasty little "whispers" or that later when he tries to communicate by writing that she can read his notes. When ignoring him does not work, her responses escalate to a level of disdain and open disrespect. These responses are all in an effort to deal openly with what the "crafty" and deceitful Flint hopes to bury. Indeed, as Jacobs maintains Dr. Flint is both "crafty"

and has the “means” to use his wiles to destroy her defenses. However, she juxtaposes contrasting images of his character, which are anything but genuine or honest. Flint’s character is both “gentle” at times as far as to be seemingly kind, and simultaneously vicious, violent, and barbarous, in Jacobs’ words “vile” a “monster.” Having established his morally corrupt character, and revealed her own ethical and moral honesty through this confession, Jacobs then turns to a frank revelation of how he sinned against her, and how she, despite her resistance, nevertheless became a victim of his malice and wrongdoings. Confessing that it became impossible to retain her sexual purity was a painful truth to accept, let alone publish.

She admits that not only did she have to live with this monstrous master, who was some “forty years [her] senior,” but more tragically because he “was [her] master,” she “was compelled to live under the same roof” being abused “daily” by his “violating the most sacred commandments of nature” (26). Moreover, she had to deal with the various tricks he employed. He even went so far as to utilize her literacy to violate her further. Jacobs realizes that Flint “came to the conclusion that such [her ability to read] might help to advance his favorite scheme. Before long, notes were often slipped into [her] hand” (28). To be sure, while Jacobs could not physically escape her master’s clutches, she uses her newly acquired literacy as a weapon against Flint, rather than as the “means” of corruption he intended. Thus, Jacobs’ revelations of her inability to attain her sexual purity and ultimate indictment of Flint’s actions and behavior exemplifies a painful truth about the conditions of the slave woman, and at the same time expose an honesty prevalent in black female virtue.

Jacobs cannot exist within the Cult of True Womanhood’s parameters for white female virtue because both her master and her mistress work in conjunction to make it impossible for her to maintain the Cult’s standards. Her master works against her by demanding her to submit

to his degradation of her chastity, thereby making her maintenance of sexual purity impossible. Moreover, her mistress Mrs. Flint does not embody the Cult's four pillars and even works against Jacobs, making her avoidance of Dr. Flint's harassments even less attainable. After learning about her husband's treatment of Jacobs, Mrs. Flint began to harass Jacobs. She remembers: "I began to be fearful for my life. It had often been threatened; and you can imagine, better than I can describe, what an unpleasant sensation it must produce to wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you" (31). Instead of helping Jacobs escape or avoid Dr. Flint, Mrs. Flint makes Jacobs' predicament worse by harassing her even more. Moreover, Jacobs invites her readers to imagine waking in the middle of the night to find a "jealous woman bending over" them. By asking for empathy, Jacobs invites a personal and sincere interpretation of her circumstances from her readers. When Jacobs told her mistress about Dr. Flint, Mrs. Flint "felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy" (30). As a victim, Jacobs claims her need for protection and justice, suggesting that she has a right to some sort of protection. Her mistress, however, who could have protected her, increases Jacobs' degradation. Rather than feel sympathy or attempt to have empathy for Jacobs, Mrs. Flint acts selfishly and focuses on her husband's unfaithfulness rather than Jacobs' helplessness. Consequently, Jacobs has little or means of protection, so she decides to create her own barrier between her and Dr. Flint's evil intentions.

Because of Mrs. Flint's inability and even refusal to follow the Cult's four pillars, Jacobs did not have the help of her mistress. Neither, did she have an example by which she might attempt to emulate purity, piety, domesticity, or submissiveness. In terms of domesticity, Jacobs observes that "Mrs. Flint possessed the key to her husband's character before I was born. She

might have used this knowledge to counsel and screen the young and innocent among her slaves, but for them she had no sympathy” (28). Instead of positively influencing her husband, Mrs. Flint chooses to be jealous, since those female slaves “were the objects of her constant suspicion and malevolence” (Jacobs 28). Even though the Cult of True Womanhood dictates that a True Woman’s home “shall be made a loving place of rest and joy and comfort for those who are dear to her” Mrs. Flint creates a suspicious and harmful environment for her slaves, who are meant to serve and help her (Welter 58). Mrs. Flint further fractures the Cult’s call to domesticity because she “had not strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash” (Jacobs 14). Jacobs identifies the hypocritical nature of Mrs. Flint’s strength: how might Mrs. Flint have enough fortitude to watch a slave beaten until the whip itself is soaked with blood but not find the strength to dictate the “affairs” of her own household? Furthermore, while the Cult directs a woman to “keep busy at morally uplifting tasks,” which included household chores, Mrs. Flint does not perpetuate housekeeping in her domestic sphere (Welter 56). Rather, she creates a space charged with violence and suspicion. Her inability to maintain a safe domestic sphere highlights Jacobs’ creation of more sincere qualities of virtue than the Cult’s, specifically when Jacobs stays in her grandmother’s garret and patiently endures a period of metaphorical gestation.

As for piety, Jacobs observes that Mrs. Flint “was a member of the church; but partaking of the Lord’s Supper did not seem to put her in a Christian frame of mind” (14). While the Cult asserts that “Religion or piety was the core of woman’s virtue, the source of her strength,” Jacobs observes that her mistress did not hold true to the notion of piety, nor did her actions seem to promote it (Welter 44). After partaking in Holy Communion, Mrs. Flint does not appear to

convey its affects, even though the Cult dictates that, as an integral part of a religious service, it should help strengthen her piety. Jacobs' observation also reveals that she judges her mistress by the Cult of True Womanhood's standards. Since many of the Cult's notions--that is, piety and domesticity--are not present in Mrs. Flint's household, Jacobs does not have an example of a True Woman to follow. Although her grandmother could stand as an example of a woman who tries to promote the values of the Cult, she carries with her the identity of a slave as well as that of a black female. Consequently, she, like Jacobs, is not held to the standards of the Cult.

Jacobs witnesses not only the breakdown of the Cult's notions in her mistress but also the lack of a safe, protected domestic sphere and the pious convictions that ought to govern it. When she examines her mistress, however, Jacobs claims, "I pitied Mrs. Flint...She was completely foiled" (31). Even though her mistress harasses her, Jacobs pities her condition, in spite of her own victimization by both her master and mistress. Thus, Jacobs demonstrates more compassion than her own mistress. In contrast to her mistress's absence of piety, domesticity, and sympathy, Jacobs exemplifies this compassion—another definer of her virtue—for the one person who refuses to offer her help in spite of Dr. Flint's endless offenses toward her helpless slave.

Another trait of Jacobs' virtue—true love—is exemplified in her relationship with her first real lover. When Jacobs claims that she loved "a free born man" with "all the ardor of a young girl's first love," she laments that "the laws gave no sanction to the marriage of such," and even if she did marry this man, he would not be able to protect her (33). When Dr. Flint found out about her lover, he reprimanded her for loving this man at all; Jacobs responded by telling him that "The man you call a puppy never insulted me, sir; and he would not love me if he did not believe me to be a virtuous woman" (35). Jacobs perpetuates and even defends her love for this man, even though her master condemns her for it. Upon hearing this, Dr. Flint "sprang" on

Jacobs “like a tiger, and gave” her a “stunning blow” (35). Because Jacobs vocalized to her master that she claimed a right to her virtuous nature, she was physically beaten. Her virtue, then, was created in silence on account of the threat of physical violence. While she vocally defies her master’s desire for her not to have a lover, she nevertheless claims her right to have one. She then refers to her master as “her tyrant” which communicates her personal connection to Dr. Flint to her readers (37). Furthermore, this reference also readies them for Jacobs’ categorization of her master as the ultimate embodiment of the obstacle--slavery--that she must defeat (37).

Jacobs continues to identify her master as the ultimate obstacle she must overcome but also begins to ponder his defeat, which reveals another trait of her virtue—determination. She claims that while Dr. Flint is “the hateful man who claimed a right to rule me, body and soul,” she “would do any thing, every thing, for the sake of defeating him” (34, 46). In going to any length to defeat her master, Jacobs specifically vows before God that she would not enter the house that Dr. Flint was building her. Even though Flint legally owns her very body, Jacobs directly defies his claims to her body and promises to defeat him. Moreover, her remembrance of Dr. Flint’s “intention to give me a home of my own, and to make a lady of me,” signifies the contradiction of his intentions: how could Jacobs’ master grant her a home of her own when he would force upon her his own ideals (45)? Furthermore, how might Jacobs become a lady if she were a commodity and merely a piece of property? While Dr. Flint’s promise to make Jacobs a lady reveals another way in which the “old sinner was politic,” her refusal to enter this unnatural domestic space is indicative of the rhetoric of her virtue (31). She determines to do “anything” and “everything” to defeat Flint, which includes choosing not to succumb to his vulgarities. The cottage Flint is building her also stands in juxtaposition to her grandmother’s garret into which

she escapes to avoid this house. Rather than live in the supposedly comfortable space Flint is building for her, she chooses to occupy the far less comfortable space in her grandmother's garret. Since she claims that she would do anything to defeat her master, she gains agency and power over him by way of the demonstration of her determination. Her language of triumphing over her master and vowing to God that she would defeat him demonstrates her dire need for freedom from his grasp and reveals an important marker of her virtue.

Jacobs' plan to escape from her master involves a method of calculation that exists as a marker of her virtue. Moreover, her plan is also indicative of the moment in which she transforms from a slave to a virtuous woman. Although she states to the reader that "I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could," she states that in terms of the actions that she took, "I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation" (46). She tells Dr. Flint that she will be a mother in a few months, so the actions that she took to bring her to her pregnancy were planned and deliberately calculated. Moreover, her means of purification is by parallel also calculated. Her pregnancy, which allows her to avoid Dr. Flint's cottage, stands as the way in which she enters motherhood and bears a child, whose presence purifies her. She becomes a virtuous woman when she stands before her master and tells him that not only is she going to be a mother but that her motherhood will allow her to defeat his plans to take away her virginity. Her calculated defeat of Dr. Flint, however, is complicated by her sense of regret and shame that she feels after confessing her pregnancy to him. Before she tells him about her pregnancy, she states, "As for Dr. Flint, I had a feeling of satisfaction and triumph in the thought of telling *him*" (48). Jacobs feels a sense of internal triumph before she vocalizes this confession. After she confesses to him, however, she states, "I thought I should be happy in my triumph over him. But now that the truth was out, and my relatives would hear of it, I felt

wretched” (48). When she realizes that her reputation will be affected, she feels miserable, but, as I argue, this stands as a part of the sacrifice she must make in order to create her black female virtue. While she states, “I had resolved that I would be virtuous, though I was a slave,” and claims that she feels humiliated, she is virtuous by way of necessity because she creates an option whereby she may obtain virtue when she previously did not have an option, aside from death (48). Moreover, she utilizes her calculation to create a space for her transformation into a virtuous woman, so this calculation is another marker of her virtue.

Before Jacobs explains her loss of virginity, she argues that the slave cannot practice principles of morality, which further highlights the near impossibility of her task and intensifies the creation of her virtue. As she explains her revenge against Dr. Flint, Jacobs asks her readers not to “judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely!” (46). Specifically, she pleads with those “happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, whose homes are protected by law,” not to judge her because they have neither lived under the same circumstances as Jacobs nor found the practice of morals impossible (46). Jacobs then claims that “the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible” (47). Jacobs cannot practice morals, especially those dictated by the Cult of True Womanhood, because slavery confuses those morals and makes observing and practicing them “impossible.” Dr. Flint completely confuses Jacobs’ morals by attempting to ruin her sexual purity, which serves as evidence for her claim about slavery confusing morals. Her creation of virtue does not presuppose a traditional set of morals, especially the notions of purity, domesticity, piety, and submissiveness as assumed by the Cult of True Womanhood because she claims that her condition as a slave--that is, Dr. Flint’s attacks on her purity--confuses all notions of morality. She creates her own notion of black female virtue that relies upon its creation via necessity, since

she creates an option whereby she does not forcefully lose her virginity to Dr. Flint. Her virtue also relies upon a new context for the notion of purity, since Jacobs creates a way in which she avoids mixing physically with her master.

Jacobs' virginal sacrifice transforms her from slave to virtuous woman because through this sacrifice, she creates and thereby enacts the remaining traits of her virtue: patience, altruism, determination, and self-control, in addition to continued enactments of honesty and courage. Moreover, through this quintessential sacrifice, she gains entrance into motherhood, whereby her care for her children produces markers of virtue that propel her into becoming a virtuous mother. Her ability to contemplate the fate of her unborn children exemplifies the beginning of her sacrifice and reveals two markers of her virtue—determination and selflessness. She claims, “I shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by my old tyrant...He never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself and his wife” (47). Not only is Jacobs repulsed by the notion of conceiving her master's offspring, but she also is aware of the automatic separation from her children that she would suffer if she did bear any of his children. While she wants to avoid losing her virginity to Dr. Flint, she also wants to protect her unborn children. Consequently, she demonstrates so much care for them that she willingly and deliberately “made a headlong plunge” (47). This strong concern for her unborn children contributes to the rhetoric of black female virtue because for slave women, the child followed the condition of the mother. Thus, if Jacobs were forced into being a mother, she would most likely see her child, as a slave, taken away from her. Through her determination, she attempts to create a life for her unborn children, one that might contain the best chance for their freedom. With Mr. Sands, she claims that she felt she could ask to have her children well supported and also feels “quite sure that they would be made free” (47). Because she was so concerned for the state and

future of her unborn children, Jacobs sacrifices her body for them. She chooses to lose her virginity, in an action of selfless concern for her children, to an unmarried man rather than forcibly lose her virginity to her master who would offer far less protection for her children.

In choosing Mr. Sands as a lover and the person to whom she offers her virginity, Jacobs demonstrates a modified marker of true love as one of the qualities of her virtue. She chooses him as her lover because she is concerned for her future children's freedom, but she also feels freedom herself because she makes the choice to love him. As she juxtaposes her master with Mr. Sands, she claims, "There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment. A master may treat you as rudely as he pleases, and you dare not speak" (47). She finds a semblance of freedom in choosing to love Mr. Sands. Her freedom in her lover demonstrates a part of the crux around which her rhetoric of virtue operates, because her desire for freedom is the driving force for many of the actions she takes, such as her relationship with Mr. Sands. Because she makes the choice to love Mr. Sands, she centers her decision around the possession of freedom. Rather than submit to her master and become his mistress, she freely chooses to love Mr. Sands and have more freedom than she could ever hope to attain with Flint. In loving Mr. Sands, she also reveals her perpetuation of a true love of sorts. She claims, "I knew the impassable gulf between us; but to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave" (47). Although she knows that their relationship will not likely end in marriage, she nonetheless finds it pleasing that she is the "object of interest" to Mr. Sands. Her definition as the "object" of Mr. Sands' interest is also ironic and revealing. While she is constantly objectified by Dr. Flint--that is, perceived as a sexual commodity--she seems willing to accept her identification as an "object" of Mr. Sands' attention.

Perhaps in this context of freely choosing a lover Jacobs is suggesting that her role as the focus of Mr. Sands' attention is acceptable. Furthermore, she feels confident that her children will attain their freedom under the care of Mr. Sands, so her relationship with Mr. Sands also guarantees in her mind a safer future for her children. Her relations with him allow her to feel less like chattel and more like a human being. Thus, before she becomes virtuous, she first begins to feel like a woman.

Dr. Flint is the obstacle Jacobs must overcome to attain her status as virtuous woman and mother. Moreover, he is also the manifestation of slavery's corrupted morals that makes Jacobs' attempts to follow any sense of established moral principles, especially chastity, impossible. She states about Dr. Flint: "when I remembered that but for *him* I might have been a virtuous, free, and happy wife, I lost my patience" (50). While she could not help being born into slavery, she loses her patience when she contemplates that Flint is the one person who prevents her from being a happy and virtuous wife. Furthermore, she claims that Dr. Flint's persecutions "had been the cause of [her] sin!" (50). Not only does she blame him for the cause of her out-of-wedlock sexual relations, but she understands him as the one who stands in the way of her happiness. He also stands as the way in which Jacobs' notions of morality are confused, especially when he tells her, "You turn aside all my good intentions toward you" (51). If Dr. Flint has been whispering foul words and impure thoughts to Jacobs, how might these whisperings be conceived as good? Moreover, how could Jacobs perceive his actions as having been derived from good intentions? Dr. Flint claims that she will realize that "your master was your best friend," but would her best friend make her prematurely knowledgeable of sexually explicit notions (50)? She must work against his inversions of morality in order to defeat the notions that he promotes.

When Jacobs manages to avoid mixing with Dr. Flint through the loss of her virginity to Mr. Sands, she demonstrates more markers of her virtue--selflessness and courage--and the implications of her sacrifice--the loss of her virginity and the sacrifice of her physical body. She claims after having been offered the choice to live in Dr. Flint's cottage with her children or to go to his son's plantation and see her children sold, "I was resolved that I would foil my master and save my children, or I would perish in the attempt" (69-70). She understands that saving her children's lives might cause her death, but once again she is ready to sacrifice her own body in order to claim the most virtuous and free life that not only she but also her children would be able to live. In her bodily sacrifice, she demonstrates not only selflessness, since she is willing to undergo death for the sake of her children, but also courage since she stands resolutely in the face of death. In order to attain their freedom, she planned continually. The first means of Jacobs' attainment of virtue, then, consists of the sacrifice of her virginity to attain freedom from her master's impending sexual abuses. The second means consists of the sacrifice of her body to attain freedom from her master and also to garner the freedom of her children.

Jacobs' employment of cunning indicates the perpetuation of her calculation as well as the selflessness she has for her children. She claims, "Who can blame the slaves for being cunning? They are constantly compelled to resort to it. It is the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of their tyrants" (82). Jacobs understands that by utilizing her cunning, she has the ability to overpower her master because she will be using the same tools as her master to subvert him. While Dr. Flint has worked by his craftiness to destabilize Jacobs' notions of morality, she works by her ability to outwit him. First, she avoids losing her virginity to him, and second, she obtains her freedom and then the freedom of her children by hiding in her grandmother's garret and avoiding him for almost seven years. After she escapes from her

master, she thinks in her concealed room, “I could lie perfectly concealed, and command a view of the street through which Dr. Flint passed to his office. Anxious as I was, I felt a gleam of satisfaction when I saw him. Thus far I had outwitted him, and I triumphed over it” (82). Her ability to escape becomes a weapon by which she begins the process of attaining her freedom. In desiring to attain her own freedom as well as the freedom of her children, she demonstrates another aspect of the rhetoric of her virtue--selflessness. While she wants to be free, she states: “It was more for my helpless children than for myself that I longed for freedom” (73). She wants her own children to attain freedom more than she desires her own freedom, so this selfless desire, manifested through her use of cunning, reveals the lengths to which she goes in order to attain freedom.

Jacobs’ selfless desire for her children stands as part of the means that propels her into her status and identity as virtuous mother. When remembering the motivation for her continued sufferings, she states, “every trial I endured, every sacrifice I made for their sakes, drew them closer to my heart, and gave me fresh courage” (74). She originally became a mother so as to avoid Dr. Flint’s sexual abuses, but her children have evolved to give her the strength to continue to avoid Dr. Flint and finally escape his clutches. She also does not experience motherhood in the same way that other white women do, because for her, it “excited a mixture of love and pain” (53). So, to perpetuate the notions that motherhood conjured in her would have been both joyful and painful, and at any moment, her sentiments of joy could be turned to horror if her children were sold from her, or if they died. Her choice to fight for the freedom of her children, though it might mean her death, is not only noble but also virtuous. Through the birth of her children, she becomes a mother, but through her overwhelmingly strong desire for not only their safety but also freedom, she becomes a virtuous mother. Her children also create another layer of virtue

because she is able to conquer Dr. Flint by escaping his grasp and thus extending another level of power over not only him but slavery as well.

Jacobs' attainment of virtue is a process that involves an enactment of another important marker of her virtue: patience. Attaining her freedom is a process, but she maintains this process patiently in order to attain her freedom so that not only she but also her children can be free from Dr. Flint. Jacobs' process of attaining freedom can be best defined through seasons, both in parallel to the actual seasons of spring through winter and figuratively, through a seven year period of gestation. She endures many dangers when hiding from Dr. Flint, and she describes one happy moment, when she finds out that her grandmother has attained ownership of her children, as her "season of joy and thanksgiving" (88). During the period in which she hides in the garret in her grandmother's shed, she suffers through the physical seasons but also endures a period of metaphorical gestation. Since she must endure these processes, which involve great pain and suffering, she exemplifies her continual patience.

Jacobs' period of waiting in her grandmother's garret that lasted nearly seven years exemplifies the womblike garret's transformative powers and the most significant example of patience, as a marker of her virtue, in her narrative. While she waits in this garret, she is consumed in total darkness and even "suffered for air even more than for light" (92). Just as her children once endured total darkness in the womb, so does Jacob endure darkness in a space that measures "nine feet long and seven wide" (91). In continuing this comparison, Jacobs has her food "passed up to [her] through the trap-door [her] uncle had contrived," (92). So, her trap door serves as the passageway for food and nutrients, much in the same way that an umbilical cord provides nutrients to an unborn child. However, while her hiding place offers protection from Dr. Flint, it offers little to no protection from the various elements of the seasons. Her suffering

through the heat of summer and chill of winter reveals the sacrifice of her body for the sake of her children's freedom, which is indicative of her selflessness. Finally, Jacobs' garret severely limits her movements, since she can sleep on one side but not move to the other "without hitting the roof" (92). As a womb, then, her garret prevents her from exercising the full movements of her limbs and joints, in the same way that an unborn child might be limited in its movements in a mother's womb. Because she is so limited, not only does she sacrifice the health of her body, but she also forsakes her natural mothering instincts. When her children pass by her hiding place, she cannot speak to them, in case her master hears about her whereabouts or her children accidentally betray her location. Her garret serves as a prolonged period of gestation that limits her bodily movements but also signifies the sufferings she endures for the sake of her children's freedom. This gestation transforms her into a virtuous mother, who waits patiently for the sake of her children's freedom in a womblike garret, more uncomfortable and less forgiving than the womb in which her children once grew.

Jacobs' womblike garret also stands a space in which she subverts her domestic sphere to become a more virtuous mother. She forgoes the safety of a hearth and home for the confines of a small garret in which she has little to no protection from the harsh weather during the seasons or from various insects. She endures all of this in order that she and her children might be free. Consequently, she becomes a virtuous mother in this space by her courage, patience, altruism, and self-control. During the nearly seven years she lives in this garret, she endures such natural elements that exemplify her continuous courage. She remembers that "the atmosphere was so stifled that even mosquitoes would not condescend to buzz in it" and then that "for weeks I was tormented by hundreds of little red insects, fine as a needle's point, that pierced through my skin, and produced an intolerable burning" (93, 96). How much courage would it have taken someone

else, even Dr. Flint, on whom Jacobs does not even wish “a worse punishment...than to suffer what I suffered in one single summer” to endure the same sufferings through which she went (96)? Enduring these sufferings for the seven years in which she suffers in her garret is also indicative of her enduring patience. As she remembers those years, she states, “O, those long, gloomy days, with no object for my eye to rest upon, and no thoughts to occupy my mind, except the dreary past and the uncertain future!” (94). Even with all of these melancholic thoughts, Jacobs still remains within her garret and waits until she has a chance to escape.

Dovetailed with Jacobs’ demonstration of patience in her garret is her altruism, exemplified by her continually selfless choice to remain in her garret. While in this cell, not only is her body but also her mental state battered against, all for the sake of her children and their freedom. She claims, “I tried to be thankful for my little cell, dismal as it was, and even to love it, as part of the price I had paid for the redemption of my children” (98). She attempts to embrace her gloomy cell so that her children may receive freedom at her own expense. Even though the health of her body is continually being compromised, she goes so far as to turn her garret into an object of thankfulness because the desire for her children’s safety and freedom re-prioritizes her perceptions. Finally, she demonstrates self-control because not only can she not freely visit with her children as she likes while she is in her cell, but she is constantly flooded with the images of her children through the peephole she obtains in her garret. One day, her son Benny was bitten by a dog, and Jacobs laments, “O, what torture to a mother’s heart, to listen to this and be unable to go to him!” (98). She denies her maternal instincts and demonstrates great self-control in order that her children have a chance to be free, even though it means she must refuse her natural maternal instincts.

While in her garret, Jacobs perpetuates her utilization of cunning and calculation by writing false letters to Dr. Flint. These letters not only undermine her master but also serve as another way in which she obtains another semblance of power over him. She writes these letters to Dr. Flint so as to “match [her] cunning against his cunning” (101). She writes letters to him addressed from New York and “dated these letters ahead, to allow for the time it would take to carry them, and sent a memorandum of the date to the messenger” (102). With these letters, she subverts items used for the perpetuation of slavery to her own advantage. When she researches the names of streets in New York in the *New York Herald* she states, “and, for once, the paper that systematically abuses the colored people, was made to render them a service” (101). Her use of this newspaper, which she claims would have been used to help white slave holders find their lost slaves, or property, demonstrates the subversion of her economic sphere while also highlighting her markers of virtue--calculation and cunning. She is able to utilize, through her literacy and cunning, an economic tool typically used by white slave holders for her own freedom. As she uses a newspaper to her own advantage, she also uses her literacy to write letters to her master so that he is led to believe she is in the North. When he receives her letters, he then tries to lie about her false letters to Jacobs’ grandmother while Jacobs observes the entire ordeal from her secluded garret. Not only does she manage to deceive Dr. Flint, but she also witnesses the evolution of this deception by his attempt to lie about a story that is a lie itself. She subverts her master through his attempted subversion of her trick.

As Jacobs prepares to leave her garret and occupy a new space in which she continues to be a virtuous mother, she gives advice to her son, thereby offering a marker of her virtue to him while also witnessing his own virtuous marker of prudence. She claims, “I resolved to have an interview with him before I went, that I might give him cautions and advice” (119). She advises

him that “if he was a good, honest boy, and loving child to his dear old grandmother, the Lord would bless him and bring him to [her]” (122). While this is a conditional statement, it reveals Jacobs’ warning to her son to be honest, just as she has been, so that he might be virtuous and one day be reunited with her. She desires that her virtuous traits be continued through her children, but as she continues to speak with Benny, she realizes that he already possesses his own marker of virtue. By his own deductions, he claims that he knew his mother was hiding in his great-grandmother’s garret: ““I knew you was here; and I have been *so* afraid they would come and catch you!”” (122). After hearing her cough above him and listening to his great-grandmother tell his sister not to betray their mother’s secret, he concluded that she was hiding in the garret. When Jacobs realizes this, she asks him if he told her secret to anyone, and she discovers that not only did he keep her secret, but he also kept people away from her garret. Jacobs claims, “Such prudence may seem extraordinary in a boy of twelve years, but slaves, being surrounded by mysteries, deceptions, and dangers, early learn to be suspicious and watchful, and prematurely cunning and cautious” (122). While her son is prudent, she also desires for him to be honest, so that not only would her virtuous markers be extended in him but also so that he may be blessed and reunited with her.

In the period before Jacobs finally obtains her children, she must go through another passage, this time by way of sea. As she sails into the Chesapeake Bay, she rejoices because she can enjoy the air and sunshine “without fear or restraint” (124). Her period in the garret made her grateful in that moment on the ship for those basic elements of nature because she “had never realized what grand things air and sunlight are till [she] had been deprived of them” (124). Interestingly, it is only once she steps onto “free soil” that her descriptions of her surroundings become more romanticized, since she claims that “the waves began to sparkle, and every thing

caught the beautiful glow” from the “reddening sky” and “the great orb” that came “up slowly out of the water, as it seemed” (125). The tangible prospect of the attainment of her freedom causes yet another transformation, one which produces a more hopeful and intimate view of nature and her surroundings. Her passage on the ship stands as another part of the process through which she must go to attain her freedom.

Once Jacobs has spent some time in the North and has been reunited with her daughter Ellen, she speaks to her about her past with her father, only to realize that her past and markers of virtue have made Ellen love her even more. Although she worries, “I had a shrinking dread of diminishing [her] child’s love” because she has not recounted to her the way in which she sacrificed her virginity, Ellen refutes this worry (145). She claims, “I know all about it, mother...I am nothing to my father, and he is nothing to me. All my love is for you” (146). Rather than bring her daughter farther from her, Jacobs’ sacrifice brings her daughter closer to her. Ellen knew about her mother’s past, but because she is able to comprehend the vastness of her mother’s love and perhaps detect the sacrifices she made as well as the implications of those sacrifices, she decides to love her mother wholly. Ellen’s attitude toward her father--that he is “nothing” to her--indicates the way in which she understands some of the complications of slavery. She recognizes that slavery corrupts morals and inverts paternal expectations. She understands that she can fully rely upon and be connected to her mother, since she is the one who guaranteed both Ellen’s and Benny’s freedom and made enormous sacrifices for them. Furthermore, Ellen’s attitude also reveals her similarity to her mother. Ellen demonstrates a strong sensitivity toward her mother’s situation, just as Jacobs has revealed her sensitivity toward her children’s situations in slavery. After her conversation with Ellen, Jacobs claims, “I loved the dear girl better for the delicacy she had manifested towards her unfortunate mother” (146).

She also feels closer to her own daughter because Ellen exhibits a mature sensitivity indicative of not only her care for her mother's condition but also her unconditional and strong love for her.

Just as Jacobs witnesses the virtuous marker of prudence in her son, she also witnesses her own marker of determination in her daughter as well as her manifestation of the advice she gave her. During Jacobs' meeting with her daughter, Ellen tells her about the secret she must keep, "Mother, I will never tell" (111). Though keeping the whereabouts of her mother to herself might seem like a difficult secret for a young girl not to betray, Jacobs claims, "she never did" (111). Ellen has the same marker of virtue—determination—that her mother has.

Furthermore, Jacobs advises her "to be a good child, to try to please the people where she was going...to say her prayers, and remember always to pray for her poor mother" (111). After six months had passed, she received a letter from Ellen, stating, "'I do try to do just as you told me to do, and I pray for you every night and morning'" (112). Not only does Ellen attempt to follow the advice her mother gave her, but she also conveys the loyalty with which she demonstrates it since she prays for her both in the morning and at night. Ellen exceeds the expectations Jacobs set for her. She establishes a virtuous habit by praying for her mother both when she wakes up and before she falls asleep. Thus, not only is Jacobs' wish for a semblance of piety in her daughter granted, but the continuation of her one of her markers of virtue is also established. Instead of inheriting Jacobs' status as slave, her daughter instead inherits those markers of virtue that allow her more freedom and sincerity than the Cult of True Womanhood or, especially, those that slavery allows.

At the close of her narrative, Jacobs explicates the way in which its ending concludes in a subverted manner. She states, "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free! We are as free from the power of slaveholders as are

the white people of the north” (156). Had she been a white woman, who could have attempted to live within the Cult of True Womanhood’s requirements, she might have more easily accepted an ending in marriage. Since she operates within her own parameters of black female virtue, however, she offers this final subversion of the Cult’s expectations by embracing the end of her narrative with the attainment of freedom. Rather than look forward to marriage in terms of the conjugal bliss and ultimate protection that it was supposed to afford most True women, Jacobs determines to embrace both her and her children’s freedom as the salvation towards which her virginal and bodily sacrifice had constantly been working. She chooses to remain content with truer freedom not dependent upon legal ties to a man that connotes relative power. Unlike the white woman, whose virtue is not as sincere as that of Jacobs’ black female virtue, Jacobs exemplifies an exclamation of freedom that stands as the ultimate result of her virtue. Because she and her children are free, a freedom that exclaims and punctuates with an exclamation point, her daughter will inherit the promise of a truer virtue. In the penultimate paragraph of her narrative, Jacobs demonstrates the sincerity of her happiness that can only come from her creation of black female virtue which is as sincere and tangible as her final possession of freedom.

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