CHANDRA MANNING
LINCOLN'S DILEMMA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Chandra Manning Interview
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The South's reaction to the 1860 election

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CHANDRA MANNING:

The election of 1860 was an exciting and tumultuous event even before the November election happened. For one thing, there were four candidates, not just two. The Democratic party had split earlier in the year in 1860 between one portion that rally behind the idea of allowing local communities to choose yes or no on slavery. And the Southern wing of the Democratic party had split off from that platform and coalesced instead around a platform calling for much firmer, federal protection and promotion for slavery. A strong firm commitment on the part of the federal government to protect and promote slavery, wherever it went. We haven't even left the Democratic party yet. So two more candidates, one, John Bell of the Constitutional Union Party, really ran on a platform of not talking about our problems, including slavery.

And then there's Abraham Lincoln. And Abraham Lincoln runs on a platform of stopping the extension of slavery, not letting it go any further, keeping it within bounds. And that platform was seen as absolute anathema to most white Southern voters. And those are the only kind of voters there are in the South in 1860. Now these are voters who are used to a federal government firmly on their side. They are used to a federal government who has always allied with the interests of slaveholders. So when a man is elected on a platform of pulling out federal control, pardon me, pulling out federal support for slavery. This is a world changer for white Southern voters. And so the reaction is– it is shock. It is fear. It is a sense that the world, as we know it has just gone away and we can't live with that.

The South's perception of Lincoln

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CHANDRA MANNING:

What did white Southerners really think? Why did Lincoln scare them so much? This is a question that we ask with our students all the time. Because if you look at what Lincoln says, and if you look from the perspective of now more than 150 years later, this looks like pretty tame stuff. We hear a guy saying, "I'm not going to touch slavery or it exists. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. The constitution is in my way. I don't stand for equality between the races and a social aspect."

CHANDRA MANNING:

This seems like a fairly safe, stayed person. It sounds like a guy who just doesn't want slavery going into New Mexico. Who could possibly get worked

up about that? Well, the answer is white Southerners could. And the reason why they could – there are many reasons why they could. One was the radical change he did represent from a federal government firmly allied with the interest of slave holders. But two is, they don't fully believe him. They don't believe that he is really going to leave slavery alone. They really believe that he is out to rip the institution up by its roots and that anything he says to the contrary is nothing more than a lie.

The reaction of enslaved people to the 1860 Election

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CHANDRA MANNING:

The election of 1860 was avidly followed by everybody in the South and that includes enslaved people. The enslaved people are in close contact with white people, with white voters who are talking about this election all the time, and they're paying very close attention. And they have their own networks. They have their own grapevines for passing information one to another. And we know, I can think for example, of an enslaved young man in his teens, in Tennessee, talking about serving while his master has people over for dinner and following so closely and learning that Lincoln has been elected and thinking immediately that this means the end of slavery and spreading word throughout his own networks, through his family and his kin and that word spreads throughout the neighborhood. So enslaved people are following this election very closely and they have their own pretty well developed networks for spreading the news.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And so enslaved people know pretty soon that Lincoln has been elected just like white people do. And what's more, when Southerners know that they do, and you can tell they know that they do because this rash of rumors about race riots starts just proliferating throughout the South. I'm thinking of a town in Texas, for example, that had a weekly trash burning. Every week they burned the trash on a certain day and they burn their trash on that same day, the week after Lincoln's election and rumors fly that slave arsonists are burning the town. So not only do enslaved Southerners follow the news of the election, not only do they know that Lincoln has been elected, white Southerners, at least some of them, are aware of that level of knowledge too. And it is part of what lands this air of fear, this air of distraughtness throughout the wide South in the wake of Lincoln's election.

Lincoln en route to Washington

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CHANDRA MANNING:

Sometimes I'll picture or envision Abraham Lincoln leaving Springfield, Illinois in 1861 to head to Washington, DC and think about what is going through this man's mind at the time that he departs. This is the time he heads to take office. He's being pulled in so many different directions. And if he were to read the accounts of himself, as I'm sure he did, he must've thought he was about 12 different people. If he reads Southern newspapers, for example, he has newspapers from Richmond, Virginia calling him a fanatic for Negro equality. And he's gotten newspapers from Montgomery, Alabama saying that his election means that the Black man is going to force himself into the white man's daughter's bed. So he's got that on the one hand. On the

other hand, he has Northern Democrats who had voted in favor of local control over slavery, who are seeing him as this radical disruptor, as this man who is going to shake up this careful balance we've had all of these years between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding States. He's going to ruin everything.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And then he might also be reading abolitionist presses who see him as weak and timid and slow and not sufficiently committed to the end of slavery. And then maybe he also reads the... In fact, he must've for his own mental health read letters and missives from friends in his own party who see him as a first step in pulling the federal government away from its relationship with slavery, but a cautious first step who will be holding this nation together. And so, if he were to think about being pulled in all these directions at once, I imagine that that had to be one fraught train ride, as he tried to figure out what to do next and how possibly to hold all of these competing interests together.

The president-elect's priorities

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CHANDRA MANNING:

At the early stage, the first thing he has to do and wants to do is to hold this Union together. Secession happens immediately, even before he arrives in Washington. South Carolina in fact, kept their legislature in session through the election of 1860 so that South Carolina could leave the Union the moment his election was announced. So seven states have already left the Union while

he is headed to Washington, but seven states leaving the Union doesn't yet necessarily mean that the whole Union is going to crumble. Those seven states aren't going to be able to stand on their own and so what he's thinking about immediately, his first goal is to try to halt secession right where it is, prevent any more states from seceding, and see if he can bring those seven back to keep this Union together. And keeping this Union together is mystically, almost religiously important to Lincoln.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And it's important to him for a number of reasons. One is, he shares a belief with many white Northerners at least, that the fate of self-government in the world is on the line here. That there's only one place. If you're looking around in 1860, there's really only one elected self-government that's working very well right now and that's the United States. There were a series of failed revolutions in Europe, just over a decade ago in 1848 and the failure of those revolutions could give ammunition to forces in the world who thinks self-government just can't work. Democracy just can't work. And so Lincoln and people like him really do think that the United States has to prove it can, has to prove that elected self-government can work.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Well elected self-government works only when we all agree to abide by the results of an election even if we don't like them and if we don't, then there's no basis for self-government. It can't work. And so when seven states leave the Union because they don't like the results of an election, it feels like more than just the United States is on the line. It feels like elected self-government is on the line. So the first thing he has to do is to show to the world in his

mind that this thing, this elected self-government could work. The other factor though, and we lose sight of this sometimes I think, is Lincoln's not an immediatist. He doesn't think that tomorrow he can wake up and get rid of slavery. He doesn't think he has the right to do that and he's not a revolutionary, he's not somebody who is in favor of overnight change of any sort anyway. But he certainly has the long-term goal of seeing an end to the institution of slavery and that's surely not going to happen if Georgia and South Carolina aren't in the Union. If they are off in their own country, slavery is going to persist there. So if you want slavery in what is the United States in 1860 and 1861 to go away, it has to remain one country. And so these goals are tied together in his mind and so the number one, the first thing he has to do is keep this Union together, because if he doesn't, none of these things come to pass.

Lincoln and the Declaration of Independence

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CHANDRA MANNING:

I would say that Lincoln's political lodestar was the Declaration of Independence. I would say that it was more than a political document to him. In fact, he said that he himself never had a political feeling that didn't spring from the Declaration of Independence. And he also said that he was concerned about how the institution of slavery had managed to convince otherwise admirable people that that Declaration of Independence was for nothing more than just self-interest. For Lincoln, it was about something much more, something much greater. It was about bounding the very justification for the existence of the United States in the basic principle of

human equality. He didn't think that the United States had achieved that principle, but he did feel it was charged with trying to get closer to it. And so that Declaration had a hold over him. It really did serve as his true North on his compass as he tried to navigate his way through just thickets and brambles that he faced at the beginning of his presidential term and really throughout his time in office.

CHANDRA MANNING:

So Lincoln really did see in his own story and his own breaking free from what he experienced as the excessive control of his father, his own charting of his path in a direction that his own father and his own background couldn't have anticipated. He really saw this story as an illustration, as a real world example of what the Declaration of Independence and a nation based on it made possible. He felt he'd lived that promise. He didn't believe that promise was fully fulfilled for everybody, but he thought that it could be, it had been for him. And to turn the national back on that promise, which is what secession felt like to him was a political betrayal. It was an ideological betrayal. It also just stood in stark contrast to his own story as he lived. He couldn't stomach that rejection. He couldn't stomach that betrayal of what he thought was best and most promising.

Northern public opinion at the outset of war

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CHANDRA MANNING:

When war breaks out in April of 1861, I think it's safe to say that nobody is prepared for what is coming next. Northern public opinion, it's varied as

millions of people will always be varied in their opinions, but by and large, most white Northerners to one degree or another share the belief that the Union has to be saved. It has to be preserved, it has to prove to the world that self-government can work. I'm thinking of a young man who will go on to enlist and he responds to Fort Sumter by saying that the hope of human rights for ages will be extinguished if the Union doesn't fight and win this war. So there's a degree of shared belief that defending the Union and saving it is necessary, but there is absolutely no conception of what is coming next because by and large, most white Northerners can't believe, and Lincoln certainly can't believe, that the majority of white Southerners really want to secede. That they're really going to fight against the Union.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Lincoln personally, and what many white Northerners generally share a belief and what Lincoln calls latent unionism and the idea that the average white Southerner really is a unionist at heart. And there are a few high and mighty politicians who are trying to thwart the will of the people, but that's not enough to fight a war, to wage a war. So a battle or two here and there, a nice parade, a few flag ceremonies and the Confederate States, the Southern states are all going to come back and it will all be over by Christmas. By and large, I'd say that's where much of the white Northern public is in 1861.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Black Northerners in 1861 at the outset of war see things a bit differently. They have a somewhat different take on the Union than white Northerners do. It hasn't, in their cases, served as an illustration of the highest ideals of the nation. It is marred by slavery, not just in a mystical sense, not just in a

symbolic sense, but in the obstacles that puts in their ways, they have a better sense than many white Northerners do as to how committed white Southerners might be to a war in defense of slavery. So Black Northerners early on have a different take than white Northerners do. They do anticipate a longer war, but some of them don't regret that, most famously Frederick Douglass thinks finally, maybe, maybe we have a chance now to do something to really root out this institution of slavery. So the Northern public divides along many lines. It certainly divides along lines of race at the outbreak of war.

Underestimation of the South's fear of emancipation

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CHANDRA MANNING:

I think one of Lincoln's greatest mistakes – he didn't make too many political mistakes, he was usually politically pretty savvy – but he made one major one. And his major one in my view was overestimating latent unionism among white Southerners. Overestimating the degree to which white Southerners would feel committed to the Union and underestimating the degree to which white Southerners would feel a need to defend slavery when they felt that it was under threat.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Specifically, I think he vastly underestimated the degree to which white non-slaveholding Southerners would embrace the defense of slavery as a necessity. I think that he didn't have too much trouble understanding or believing that elite white Southerners, the slavocracy as the Republicans

called them, he didn't have too much trouble understanding why someone who owned a large plantation would fight in defense of slavery. But I think he and white Northerners really did not grasp how committed the average white non-slaveholding Southerner would be to opposing abolition. I don't think he understood the threat that non-slaveholding white Southerners viewed even the faintest whiff of abolition to be to themselves, to their families, to their communities, to the world as they knew it.

Motivations of white non-slave holders in the South

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CHANDRA MANNING:

I think one of the great mysteries of the Civil War of understanding the way the world looked in 1860 and 1861 to white Southerners in particular is trying to get our minds around, how did non slave holders feel about slavery? I know for my own self that for the longest time, I assumed they probably didn't think too much about it. Didn't directly benefit them. Why would they care if it was there or not there? And I think it helps to try to put ourselves in the minds of white Southerners in 1860 and when we do that, things really look different. When we do that, when we dive into, for example, the letters that non-slaveholding Confederate soldiers wrote home over the course of the Civil War, we see a really much different picture. We see white non-slaveholders as people whose worlds is defined by this institution of slavery, whether or not they own any slaves.

CHANDRA MANNING:

We see people who like Lincoln believe in the right to rise, the right to move up the economic ladder and the social ladder, but who tie that right entirely to the institution of slavery. And they're not wrong. The way up was through the ownership and cultivation of land. And the quickest, easiest, most remunerative way to do that was with enslaved labor so even if I don't own a slave today, maybe I can work hard enough and own one in the future, and that's how I will move up. So first of all, slavery is deeply connected in most white Southerners minds with economic mobility, with the very promise that that Lincoln sees in the Declaration of Independence.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Slavery is also tied in many non-slaveholders minds to religion, to their way of reading the Bible. These are people, by and large, deeply motivated and committed to a particular evangelical Christian view of the world that takes the Bible as literal truth, and there is slavery in the Bible. So if there is slavery in the Bible, who are we, who are white Northerners? Who are mere humans to think that we know better than God, how the world should be structured? So, to oppose slavery, to even hint at abolition is to hint at knowing better than God how society should be structured. That's a threatening worldview. That's a threatening position, whether or not you own slaves. And then finally, white non-slave holders in the Confederate States live in a world where 40% of the population is Black and enslaved. And that, in their view, is recipe for race war. That is recipe for clear and present danger if there's not a controlling institution like slavery to keep this threat in place.

CHANDRA MANNING:

This isn't an abstract, philosophical fear on the part of non-slave holders. This is something really visceral, very real to them. So there's a non-slave holding soldier, for example, who writes home to his wife; it's coming to harvest time, she's expecting a baby, she can't understand why he can't come home and help and he knows why he can't come home to help. He can't come home to help because if abolition happens, then the Black man will demand an equality with the white man. The Black man's son shall share a bed with a white man's daughter and then shall commence a war of the races. This is not an abstraction to him. This is a fear. This is a gut level fear. And I think that we, in 2020, just as much as Lincoln in 1861, underestimate the power that that fear had to motivate many white non-slave holding Southerners.

Frank Baker, Shepard Mallory and James Townsend

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CHANDRA MANNING:

The war breaks out and Union forces start making their way into the Confederacy. In some places, Union forces are already there. Fort Monroe, Virginia has been a United States Fort since the aftermath of the war of 1812. It never left U.S. hands even when Virginia seceded. So there is a U.S. Army presence, a Union army presence at Fort Monroe on the Eastern coast of Virginia right from the beginning of the war. Of course, there are Confederates surrounding it because it's in Virginia. One of those Confederates is a Confederate Colonel, Colonel Mallory, who owns several enslaved people and he's about to send some of them further South, more towards Richmond to build Confederate fortifications – forced labor for the Confederate army, in essence.

And three of those men, Frank Baker, Shepherd Mallory, and James Townsend decide that they're not going to go because that would separate them from their families. Now, Baker, Mallory and Townsend have never wanted to be slaves, they've never wanted to be separated from their families and they have always faced that threat under slavery. But now, it's May 1861 and there's something they can do about it that they couldn't do all those years in bondage. And what they can do is they can run to another force. They can run to another source of power that's greater than that held by their enslaver.

So it's May 23rd, 1861 and these three men sail from where they are held enslaved, they sail to Fort Monroe. The moon is out that night and they navigate because they know these tricky waters. They navigate to Fort Monroe and they present themselves to the Union army. Well, the next day comes, Colonel Mallory realizes they're missing, he has an idea about where they might've gone. And he sends an agent to Fort Monroe to demand the return of his property under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which requires, which requires the return, the rendition of any enslaved people who try to flee bondage. Well, his agent runs into Union General, Benjamin Butler, and Butler is a character.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Nobody would confuse Benjamin Butler with a committed abolitionist, but Butler is a pretty wily legal thinker. And Butler knows that the Union has a war to win here and that there are some international rules of war that can help the Union in this cause and he's going to apply them right here. He informs the agent that Virginia claims to be out of the Union. And if Virginia is out of the Union, it certainly cannot call upon the federal government to

enforce laws on its behalf when it is fighting for the overthrow of that government. So no, we're not going to enforce this Fugitive Slave Act and return the three men who have run from you.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And furthermore, the international rules of war permit the confiscation of enemy property being used against us in war. You Southerners have been nothing if not insistent that slaves were your property. So by your own reasoning, these men can be confiscated as “contraband of war” and he will not send them back. So these three men have made it to the Union army and they have not been returned to their owner. Well, what's that make them? Well, Butler's not quite sure. In fact, nobody's quite sure what it makes them at first. Butler himself was not declaring the men property so much as he was using the Confederate insistence on slave property as a way of removing those three men from the grasp of their owner. The Union army certainly doesn't want, have use for, even recognize a slave property, so the Union is not going to own them, they must be free.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And so, the exact legal status into which these three men enter is foggy, vague, ambiguous at best, but here's what they know and here's what Butler knows and here's what their owner knows – they're not slaves anymore and word spreads. And within weeks, 800 men, women and children have run to Fort Monroe and they have taken refuge. They have fled slavery. They have found a refuge from slavery with the Union army. Now it's an imperfect refuge, but it's not slavery.

CHANDRA MANNING:

I think it is a first step on the road to emancipation. And there's no question as to who took that first step. That first step was taken by the men, women and children who were held in bondage. The men, women, and children who had hated being enslaved ever since slavery had existed, who had wanted a road out of bondage ever since bondage existed. But now, now that there is a war on, now that there is a force, now that there is a power fighting against slaveholders, not upholding slaveholders, but fighting against them. Now these same men, women and children who have hated all those years, now when they take that first step, there's a path. There's another step and another step that they can take. And so, they will begin to ally with that source of power, with that Union army. And that alliance will begin to take down the institution of slavery.

The actions of enslaved people translate Into policy

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CHANDRA MANNING:

The question becomes, where does the path out of slavery that these enslaved people are carving and where does the alliance they build with the Union army, where does that fit with, where does that connect with President Lincoln? Well, it begins to create opportunities for Lincoln that didn't exist in the absence of secession, didn't exist in the absence of war and wouldn't exist in the absence of pressure from enslaved people. Because whatever Lincoln wants and whatever the Republican party wants and whatever policies they might craft in Washington, they have to bring a Northern public along. And

that Northern public is divided. It includes some people who are all for ripping this thing up by the roots from the outset, but it also is comprised of a whole lot of people who aren't sure about emancipation, who think it's a distraction, who worry about the impact of emancipation on the balance, who don't even like the idea of fighting to free Black people very much. Lincoln's got to bring those people onboard too.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And so, the actions that enslaved people undertake and the alliance they build with the Union army starts to create a pressure force. A pressure force that can help propel towards emancipation much faster than Lincoln or the Republicans could possibly do against the weight of part of Northern opinion if there wasn't this countervailing pressure force. This alliance, this enslaved driven Union army alliance also illuminates new possibilities that aren't there in the absence of war and aren't there if enslaved people aren't acting. Enslaved people arrived at the Union army not just at Fort Monroe, they do it everywhere where the Union army goes and they start making themselves into a force that's contributing to the Union war effort. They labor for the Union army. They dig fortifications, they transport, they become teamsters. They load and unload docks and railroads. They know the territory, they can help navigate. They know the human landscape, they can serve as spies. They provide espionage intelligence. They nurse, they launder, they cook. They become a force for the Union war effort. They make very clear that they are helping to save this Union at the exact moment that Confederates are trying to destroy it. They make an argument for emancipation that's so much more powerful than a political argument alone could be. They make an argument

that you simply can't protect the rights, the property rights of people trying to destroy the Union at the expense of this force that's helping to save it. And so, they become an absolutely critical piece in how the Union war effort can ever more explicitly also become an emancipation effort, an abolition effort.

How do the actions of enslaved people and their alliance with the Union army? How does that translate into actual policy, into actual legislation? Because it does. And we see that happen in a number of steps along the way. And the first one we see, I think, is the first Confiscation Act, which has passed in August 1861. And the first Confiscation Act essentially takes what Butler did in response to the actions of Shepard Mallory, and Baker and Townsend and it translates them into law. A law that doesn't single handedly end slavery, but is, is the federal government taking direct aim slavery, which it hasn't done before. The First Confiscation Act of August 1861 says that the Union army can confiscate any property being used in aid of the Confederate war effort, but it has a separate section at the end.

CHANDRA MANNING:

It puts enslaved people in their own section, and it's doing that to separate them out, they aren't just fence rails and they're not the same as livestock, they're people. They're not the same thing. But that same principle is going to be used to say that men that were sent to dig fortifications, or women who are being forced to do Confederate laundry, if they make it to the Union army, they are not slaves anymore. It is the exact logic that those three men put into motion on that moonlit night and May, written into law by the United States Congress in August 1861.

‘Contraband‘ camps

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CHANDRA MANNING:

Where do enslaved people go when they run to the Union army? An army is an army, it has one goal. That goal is to fight and win a war. So when first tens and then hundreds and of thousands, and eventually almost half a million make their way to the Union army, where do they go? There's not a Red Cross, there's not a UN. Armies aren't great humanitarian organizations, so what happens to this half a million people when they show up with the army? Well, they end up in places that have the name that we call “contraband” camps. And that's a funny name. And when I first start talking to my students about “contraband” camps, half of them think I'm talking about cigars stolen from Cuba in the war, and I'm not. The name “contraband” camps came from, really Butler's move in May of 1861 to label escaping enslaved people, ”contraband” of war.

CHANDRA MANNING:

So the “contraband” camps are encampments that attach themselves to Union army encampments. What they are in reality, are 1860s refugee camps on United States soil. They are ad hoc, they pop up immediately. There's not an advanced infrastructure or network put in place in order to care for thousands of people who arrived to Union army lines. They've often left, they've often fled carrying almost nothing, but what they can carry on their backs. They are often overworked and underfed before they even leave. And then they need to escape, which can take days or even longer on the run to make it to the Union army. Disease is prevalent everywhere during the war

and if they aren't carrying disease or they aren't sickened and before they get to Union army lines, put thousands of them in close quarters without sufficient running water and disease is going to spread once they get there.

So where do so many of these thousands spend the war? They spend the more in what is a refugee camp. In the absence of any humanitarian organization to mitigate the many dangers and hardships of life in a refugee camp. Now camps vary from place to place, there's certainly no Washington blueprint for how to build one, because who builds them really are the enslaved people by showing up. So in some places they are nothing more than shelters that can be put together with whatever's the hand, pine boughs, or maybe some cast off army tents. They're close quarters, they are breeding grounds for disease and for hunger. And there are among Union soldiers, some of whom are on board with the idea of fighting to end slavery and some of whom would rather not be bothered with a thousand more mouths to feed suddenly in camp.

CHANDRA MANNING:

So it's a treacherous environment. It is an environment fraught with peril and hardship. And one of the things that I think it should tell us is that the thousands of men, women, and children who ran to those environments, knew that and chose to run there anyway. And I think that tells us something crucially important about A, hatred of slavery, because slavery was worse and B, commitment to freedom. Commitment to get out, commitments to make something better. The courage and the determination that it took to get to a “contraband” camp and then to survive there really boggles the mind. And then once they got there, they didn't just survive there, they aided the Union

war effort. They became a major part of how an army could stay in the field and fight.

CHANDRA MANNING:

By the midpoint of the war, “contraband” camps even become recruiting grounds. Once Black soldiers are accepted into the Union army, “contraband” camps are instant recruiting grounds and thousands of African American men fight for the Union army out of these “contraband” camps. So they are born of necessity, they are often the sites of desperation and terrible suffering, but they are also the exact place where new steps on the road to emancipation are illuminated and taken. And they are a major factor in how the Union army keeps an army in the field and wins a war that turns out to become a war of attrition, turns into a war that will be determined by who can keep an army in the field the longest.

Lincoln’s evolution on slavery

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CHANDRA MANNING:

I think if and how and whether and when Lincoln's own views, personal views, moral views on slavery changed over the course of the war is one of the most perennial questions that historians and our students wrestle with. And I think it's an important one to continue wrestling with, I think it matters. I know my own ideas of it have changed over time a little bit. And the way I think about it now is I'm not sure that Lincoln's moral ideas of slavery,

the institution, changed. I think he always hated it. I think he always thought it was evil. I think he always sincerely and truly yearned for its destruction.

But I do think that maybe his ideas and attitudes about enslaved people – the individuals – I think those might have changed over time. I think the issue, as an abstraction, was always a moral issue and one he always felt sincerely about, but I think it was an abstraction, in large measure, for him. And I don't think the war let it stay an abstraction.

CHANDRA MANNING:

When Lincoln was president, for much of his presidency, in the summer months, he and his family would stay in a cottage that was on the outskirts of Washington then. It's part of downtown D.C. now near Georgia-Petworth, but then, it was far enough out that to get there back and forth from the White House each day, he would commute. And his path took him right by one of these "contraband" camps. And so every day he would pass by the men and the women and the children who are living in these camps, who are suffering in these camps, who are working in these camps, who are finding ways to aid the Union in these camps.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And I think that daily journey, along with the stories that come in from soldiers interacting with slaves, and visits from African-Americans Frederick Douglass, a delegation in 1862, those interactions, I think might occasion a change, an evolution, a development, in how Lincoln thinks about enslaved people as individuals. And I do think we see some change there. I do think that the Lincoln who at the very end of his life would call for at least limited Black male suffrage was not a Lincoln we saw in 1861. And I think that

Lincoln is a Lincoln who has been deeply affected by the African-American human beings that he meets and sees and interacts with during this war.

And the actions of African-American soldiers are another factor, I believe, in this evolution that I think Lincoln does undergo in how he feels morally about enslaved people, about the individual human beings. The great risks that African-American men faced in order to fight, and then their performance and courage in battle could not help but move Lincoln. When Black soldiers enlist in the Union army, the Confederacy responds with the announcement that Black Union soldiers taken in battle can't possibly be soldiers, they must be escaped slaves; absolutely refusal to see Black Union soldiers as legitimate soldiers. And therefore, the Confederacy announces that it will either send these supposed escaped slaves back to slavery, or it will kill them.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And so Black Union soldiers are fighting in the face of grave, grave risks. Everybody's fighting in the face of risk, but the risk that Black Union soldiers are facing are much higher than those faced by anyone else, and yet they fight anyway. And not only that, they fight extremely well. And so those actions, that courage, that commitment and that devotion to a Union that really hadn't shown a ton of devotion to them up to that point, that does instill a sense of moral obligation, I believe, in Abraham Lincoln, not just to the destruction of a legal institution called slavery, but to the individuals enslaved, to African-American men, women, and children.

CHANDRA MANNING:

When he is being pushed in some of the darker days of the war to reconsider, maybe backtrack a little on emancipation, Lincoln, absolutely shoots down

that idea. And this isn't even speculation, one of the reasons that he gives is, "That they have stood by us. African-American men, African-American soldiers have fought for us. Were we to turn on them, I would be damned in time and eternity, and should be." So those actions are an absolutely critical element, I believe, to an evolution that I do think we see in Lincoln.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Now, I don't want to turn Lincoln into a saint. He wasn't. He was a flawed human being. He had limitations. Certainly, he was not as committed to egalitarianism as, say, somebody like Frederick Douglass was, but I still do think that Lincoln in 1865 looked a lot like Lincoln of 1861 in his feelings about the institution of slavery, but looked a bit different than Lincoln of 1861 in his feelings about relations between the races and about the actual enslaved human beings, African-American men, women, and children.

White soldiers' views on slavery

00:46:13:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

So, where were white Union soldiers? Where are the guys actually enlisting and fighting this war? Where do they fall on this question of slavery? Where do they fall on African-Americans? And their story is an interesting story. White Union soldiers might begin the war and do begin the war with a wide array of attitudes and opinions about the institution of slavery. Certainly, there are white Union soldiers who, from the outset, see the war as a blow against slavery and embrace it for precisely that reason. But there are a whole lot of white Union soldiers who haven't given slavery that much

thought one way or another. And maybe if they had, wouldn't be all that gung-ho about putting themselves in harm's way to end slavery.

CHANDRA MANNING:

So there's an array of opinion at the beginning of the war, much like there's an array of white Northern opinion generally on slavery and the war. But then Union soldiers go into the Confederacy, Union soldiers go South. And the experience of actually being in the South and actually interacting with slaves, actually seeing enslaved people with their own eyes, that really exerts an impact on white Union soldiers. And so we begin to see in the Union ranks early in the war, between roughly September and December of 1861, we begin to see a cry that I, myself, at least hadn't expected. And that cry is, "We've got to end this institution of slavery. If we don't, we're just going to fight this thing over and over. We have to rip up the cause by the roots. And if we don't, the plant is just going to spring back to life."

CHANDRA MANNING:

So earlier than most the Northern public, white Union soldiers, as a group, not all individuals, but as a group, become a pressure force for taking action against slavery. Like Lincoln though, they don't all immediately embrace or sometimes ever embrace the notion of equality or even increased interaction with actual slaves. There are plenty of Union soldiers who can want to take action against slavery and still not think too much of individual slaves and not want to have much to do with individual slaves. And that position becomes harder and harder to maintain for many of them as the war goes on. Some manage to maintain that with no problem, but for many of them, that becomes harder and harder to maintain as they interact with enslaved men,

women, and children in “contraband” camps, as they see that the person doing their laundry, helping them win this war, as opposed to the people fighting against them, is an African-American woman or a man or a child.

And so we begin to see on the part of the Union army, a transition brought by their own experience. And then there's the enlistment of Black Union soldiers, and then we definitely see an intensification of a change we've begun to see in the regarding of enslaved men and women and children as human and as having legitimate claims on them and on the United States government. And Black enlistments is certainly a time when we see this dynamic at work. And I'm thinking in particular of one Union soldier who writes home after the battle of Port Hudson, which is one of the very first times that African-American men fight in combat, in pitched battle. And he had been a white officer who had fought, therefore, closer to African-American soldiers than, say, another white enlisted man in another troop.

CHANDRA MANNING:

But he writes home and he says, "I nevermore want to hear the expression that the Negro won't fight. Come 100 yards with me, and you will see the truest man who ever set eyes on a rebel." And he goes on to describe the courage, and he goes on to describe Black Union soldiers who are in grave danger and who are wounded and who are injured and who stay in the fight anyway. And this was a man who hadn't been so sure that Black enlistment was a good idea, but he nevermore wants to hear the expression that the Negro won't fight. And he sends this letter home and it ends up getting published in a newspaper.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And that little incident, I think, is a microcosm that we see repeated again and again, where white Union soldiers have their doubts and see Black Union soldiers in battle and are forced to, if not suddenly become advocates for equal rights, at least re-examine their own presumptions and their own prejudices. And, what is more, call on those at home to do the same thing. And I think that's an important dynamic over the course of the war. And I think it's an important dynamic that Lincoln recognizes, too. Again, it helps create a pressure force that he can use to counteract the pressure force of white Northern opinion that is opposed to emancipation, that is opposed to increased rights.

War's suffering & Lincoln's search for its meaning

00:52:00:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

I think one of the perennially fruitful things to ponder with Lincoln is how he responds to all of these forces. That there's all the actions of enslaved people and there's actions of soldiers, and those are creating possibilities that don't exist before. Where's that leave Lincoln? What role does Lincoln play? Well, the reaction of the leader to these forces really will determine if these forces are going to go forward, or are they going to be stymied? Are they going to set back? I think how Lincoln responds to the experiences of the war are one of the most fascinating things about him.

CHANDRA MANNING:

It's not inconceivable that a different leader could witness the exact same things Lincoln did, and come to much different conclusions, act much differently, not do an Emancipation Proclamation, not come out in favor of a Thirteenth Amendment. And in fact, we don't even have to make up a bizarro world to envision that, we just have to think about the election of 1864, when he ran around against General George McClellan, who had seen the same war Lincoln had and ran on a far different platform, who would not have stood for a Thirteenth Amendment, who would not have stood for fighting the war to a conclusion that included abolition and Union.

CHANDRA MANNING:

So what was it about Lincoln that made possible, that engendered his response to the experiences of war, to the forces he was witnessing? And I honestly think that one of the qualities, one of the factors that helps us understand Lincoln and his responses is suffering. Is that Lincoln's capacity to notice and respond to human suffering is part of what matters most characterizes his leadership during the Civil War. Certainly, he had experienced personal suffering. He had witnessed the death of two of his children, one of them in the White House – the one he was closest to – in the White House in 1862. While he is trying to serve as president and prosecute a war, his child dies.

CHANDRA MANNING:

We tell the story over and over, and it starts fading into the woodwork, but he had to endure that while he was president. He endures, feels personally, the suffering of Union soldiers dying, and their families on the home front learning to cope. When he is at the summer White House, the Lincoln Cottage

on the outskirts of Washington, D.C., that Lincoln's Cottage ... that the old Soldiers' Home, there is a cemetery being built, new graves dug regularly. He walks by those graves on the same journey that takes him by the "contraband" camp. He sees suffering. And it is, I believe, his capacity to be moved by that suffering, to be opened up by that suffering, to see new possibilities out of that suffering, that most account for Lincoln's greatest qualities as president.

CHANDRA MANNING:

The second inaugural address, the second inaugural address, which does not shy away from, which does not try to gloss over the terrible loss and tragedy the war has been, but rather tries to share that loss, share responsibility for that loss, take inspiration from that loss and go forward from that loss. That set the second inaugural address apart as one of the greatest speeches in all of American politics, but also I think really lend insight into who and how Lincoln was. So much suffering, so much loss, could either be just turned away from or could be internalized, and could be experienced as a call to redemption, a call to atonement. And to me, it is that second way, the call to redemption, the call to atonement, that we see in Lincoln. And it is not every human being who would respond that way, but Lincoln did.

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CHANDRA MANNING:

Another quality I think we have to take into account as we try to understand Lincoln, as we try to take his measure, as we try to understand his leadership through the war, is Lincoln's sort of deep quest to find meaning, to understand, to not allow, as he says in the Gettysburg Address, "Those who

died here to have died in vain." To feel a genuine obligation to make all the sacrifice and all the loss mean something. And not just for him and not just sort of for his legacy, although that might've mattered too, but he does seem to evince this true belief that part of the role of a leader, his job as president, was not just to walk alongside Americans through this struggle and through this suffering, but to help them make some meaning, to help his fellow Americans know that all they had suffered and lost and sacrificed was not just some nihilistic gigantic blunder or mistake, that there was purpose. They were allied together in a purpose. And it was probably a purpose that none of them could see exactly.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Lincoln's deep humility, alongside his suffering, I think is another really important piece to understanding who he is and how he leads. Lincoln leaves space for the possibility that maybe he and we humans don't have it all figured out, that there could be some greater purpose here that is a little bit different than any of us can see. And if that's the case, it still remains our duty, it still remains his duty as the leader, to align with that purpose, to see to it that not just his suffering, not just the loss of his son, not just his own strain and worry in the graves he passes, but everybody's, but yours and yours and yours, that all of that actually adds up to something. And part of his job is to help you see what that something is, is to help you believe that those ideals in the Declaration of Independence, those ideals we've never quite met and never fully met, your suffering, can help bring us a little closer to them.

CHANDRA MANNING:

I truly believe that he sees that as part of his job as leader. And he sees it so clearly, in part, because he is a man who knows suffering. He knows suffering personally because of things that happened to him. He knows suffering because of his own vulnerability to depression, to what he called the "hypo," just sense of despair. He knew what despair felt like. And part of his role as leader was to not let that sense of despair settle permanently on those who had also suffered and all those who had sacrificed and all those who had lost.

The Gettysburg Address

01:00:34:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

We see Lincoln in November of 1863 traveling to Gettysburg, to a cemetery, to a place that is a visual reminder of so much death and so much loss. And he doesn't say very much there. If we count the words, there are only 272 of them. But in those 272 words, which culminate with a sense of a new birth of freedom, he says so much more than he did in the umpty-thousand words of the first inaugural address. And how and why can he do that? If we think about that, "a new birth," he's talking about birth, about beginning, in November at the end of the year, as the days are getting darker, in a cemetery at a time when, frankly, the war is just not going that well. How does he get there?

CHANDRA MANNING:

And I think that the only possible way he could is by choosing to understand, to seek meaning in the suffering, in that darkness, in the cemetery, to try to find in it a new beginning. Because if it's not, if it's an ending, then those

deaths are all in vain. If there is no higher purpose, if there is no point, then he's telling lies there in November of 1863. And whatever else Lincoln is doing at Gettysburg in 1863, I do not think he's lying. I do think that he, in this dark and dim and grim moment, surrounded by sacrifice and surrounded by loss, is finding the beginning of something that couldn't be imagined even by him in 1861. It could be imagined now.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And part of the difficulty of this whole question is it could be imagined only because of such suffering and such loss. And he's not a Pollyanna. He's not a guy who's going to say, "So see, it was all worth it." He's not going to say, "See, it was fine," and neither should we. But we should grapple, I think, with how closely connected the suffering and the loss and the possibility, for the first time in the history of the country, a genuine birth of freedom was. I think we should reckon with how tightly tied together those things are. And one of the marvels of Lincoln is he didn't shy away from that reckoning.

The Emancipation Proclamation

01:03:34:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

What was the Emancipation Proclamation? Another perennial question that has been answered with hyperbole in two different directions. We can either look at it as this moment that changed everything as the stroke of the pen that freed millions, or– it has been described that way. Or it can be described as a cynical ploy with all "the moral grandeur of a bill of lading," as the historian Richard Hofstadter famously said. Most frequently, we hear people

talk about the Emancipation Proclamation as a meaningless document that didn't free a single slave, and you can make a case for any of the three of these things.

CHANDRA MANNING:

I actually think that a better way to think about the Emancipation Proclamation is as a crucial step in a process that began before it and lasted much longer than it. We make a mistake if we see it as meaningless, and we make a mistake if we see it as everything. It is a step that had the way paved the moment that those three enslaved men ran to Benjamin Butler, we've begun. We're on the road. A step, a stone, has been placed. And, it'll take several of those stones. It takes the men, women, and children running to the Union Army. It takes the Confiscation Acts. It takes the Militia Act of 1862. It takes pressure on the part of Lincoln to try to get border state legislatures to act on their own. All of these are steps in a process that will eventually end slavery.

CHANDRA MANNING:

The Emancipation Proclamation, I see as the midpoint step. It's not the beginning, and it's not the end. It's an important midpoint step, with limitations, to be sure. The limitations include that it is a military document. It has military authority and not civil authority; therefore, it can only apply in areas where the civil authority of the United States is not recognized. States in rebellion. It can only apply there. It doesn't apply to somebody who is enslaved in Maryland or Kentucky, a state that remains in the Union.

It's a military document, meaning when the war is over, it will lose its force. All of these are limitations to be sure. And, it isn't the Gettysburg Address. It's

not the Second Inaugural Address. It isn't filled with the language that uplifts. But, it does carry that last phrase in it, that culminating phrase in it about "forever free," and we shouldn't overlook that phrase because it's a midpoint that actually, I think, signals a direction. It's a direction we can lose sight of.

Because we know that the war ended slavery, we can assume that once the war started, it was inevitable it was going to end one way or another. And, I don't think we're right there. I think we are looking at that question as people in the 21st century. If you look at that question in the 19th century, war has made many more slaves than they freed. A war permanently ending the institution of slavery? That hadn't happened very often in world history if you're looking in 1862.

CHANDRA MANNING:

So, when the preliminary and then the final Emancipation Proclamation allied the war with the end of slavery, that's an important moment. That's an important moment in signaling the war aims of this particular war. That's an important moment in explicitly allying a war for the Union with a war to end slavery. That's been an implicit alliance that becomes explicit in this document, and it's really setting this war apart from what most wars have done in world history. I don't think we should underestimate any of those things.

CHANDRA MANNING:

I also don't think we should think that single-handedly slavery vanished with the Emancipation Proclamation. It was a military document. It would lose force when the war was over. It did leave some men, women, children in bondage. And so, the successive steps, the fighting of Black soldiers, the

passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, all of those steps, the action on the part of legislatures in Missouri and Maryland, all of those steps were important as well. They all add up to the end of slavery not as one magical moment, but as one long process. The Emancipation Proclamation cannot be understood without seeing that whole process, and that whole process isn't fully understood without the Emancipation Proclamation.

01:08:17:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

I think it is a demarcation line in the public positioning of the war as a war for the Union and emancipation. I'm not sure it's a demarcation line after which there was no turning back. Most of world history had turned back. Most of world history showed that wars that emancipated some slaves didn't necessarily end in emancipation, nor was emancipation itself necessarily permanent. Re-enslavement of those emancipated during a war was the norm in world history. So, the Emancipation Proclamation, if things just stopped there, I'm not sure that the war would unambiguously have permanently ended slavery.

CHANDRA MANNING:

There's a lot of pressure of world history pushing the other way, and, certainly, defeated Confederates would do their very best to roll back emancipation. Why couldn't they roll back emancipation? They couldn't roll back emancipation because of the Thirteenth Amendment. It took that constitutional amendment. So, we can see the Emancipation Proclamation as a milestone in a number of ways. I'm not willing to call it the point of no return. I think that there were certainly people who would've loved for it to

be the point of no return, who hoped that was enough. Now we don't have to worry about slavery anymore. But, I don't think the weight of world history points in that direction.

The Emancipation Proclamation in the lives of the enslaved

01:10:01:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

The impact of the Emancipation on enslaved people themselves varied from time to time and place to place. Certainly, there are thousands who are emancipated before the Emancipation Proclamation. Those who have made it to the Union Army before the Proclamation are already emancipated by virtue of making it to the Union Army, so it doesn't change their personal status. But, what it does do to the men, women, and children in “contraband” camps, for example, is it does more clearly announce the war as a war against slavery as well as a war for the Union. It positions the war and emancipation more publicly aligned. That matters. That matters. If you are risking your life in a “contraband” camp day in and day out, that matters.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Word spreads. For sure, word spreads. In fact, the numbers of men, women, and children running to the Union Army after the Emancipation Proclamation go up very quickly. There had been a steady run before the Proclamation, but it spikes after. So, it's clear that word is spreading and is giving fuel to the

belief that this war is going to result or can result in the destruction of slavery.

CHANDRA MANNING:

There are parts of the Confederacy where word doesn't spread or where, if word doesn't spread, at least the practical effect, it doesn't spread, because emancipation is only experienced to the degree that it can be enforced. It isn't felt. Its day-to-day workings aren't felt in the lives of enslaved people in the far distant reaches of the Confederacy where the Union Army isn't. But, even there, when word gets there, it still makes this war sound like a war more closely aligned with hopes for slavery.

CHANDRA MANNING:

So, practical impact? Numbers going to camps goes up. It goes up a lot. But, also, the hope impact, the hope that rumors and hopes that this war might somehow have something to do with slavery crystallize into something sharper with the Emancipation Proclamation.

Frederick Douglass' influence on Lincoln

01:12:23:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

Now, one of the constituencies, of course, that Lincoln is constantly balancing in the balancing act that is his presidency is one that's easy to overlook, and that is Northern free Black opinion. We like to see ourselves as the most enlightened generation, and there couldn't have been anybody back then who was as forward-thinking as us in matters of race and equality, right? Well,

we're wrong because there were Northern abolitionists. In particular, there are African-American Northern abolitionists who are at the forefront of calling for equality and are calling for justice even before the war began.

One of the things that's interesting over the course of the war is how Lincoln responds and interacts with that particular segment of Northern opinion, and in particular, with African-American individuals, because he didn't have a lot of interaction and a one-on-one basis with, say, a Frederick Douglass, a leading Northern Black intellectual, before the war. Even during the war they only meet a total of three times. But, it's quite interesting to watch the evolution in their relationship over the course of the war.

CHANDRA MANNING:

One of the things that is notable is the influence that both Lincoln and Douglass, I think, have on each other. Douglass and Lincoln operate in different spheres. Frederick Douglass does not have the constraints of Congress and the Constitution in the way that Lincoln does, and he can articulate a morally pure position that Lincoln is hindered from doing much about by the office. Frederick Douglass has just moral clarity. His words are stirring. But, he doesn't have his hands on the levers of power the way that Lincoln does. And so, they both have access to something that the other doesn't. It's interesting to me to watch their growing appreciation of the other as the war transpires.

CHANDRA MANNING:

Frederick Douglass, over the course of his life, both during and after the war, would be cyclical in his opinions of Lincoln. Sometimes he would view Lincoln with disappointment, as the white man's president who saw

African-Americans as nothing more than stepchildren. It's not hard to see why he would say that. It's not hard to see why some of the things that Lincoln said about social distance between the races, for example, as rubbing somebody like Douglass the wrong way, understandably.

CHANDRA MANNING:

It's not at all hard to see why somebody like Frederick Douglass would be disappointed and feel let down about the pace of change or about how, in later years, Americans would seem to turn their backs on some of the changes of the war. But, there's also the Douglass who does see in Lincoln a comrade, who sees in Lincoln an ally, who sees in Lincoln a leader and also somebody who treated him, Frederick Douglass, as, in the words of Frederick Douglass, "a man." As somebody who treated him as a social and intellectual equal.

01:16:00:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

The famous story that's easiest to illustrate this point is at the second inauguration. When Frederick Douglass arrives at the White House at the second inauguration and is barred from the door because he is Black, he sends somebody to get Lincoln's attention. Lincoln comes and says, "Ah, there is my friend, Douglass." Frederick Douglass comes in, and Lincoln asks for Douglass' opinion about the Second Inaugural Address. "There's no one's opinion I value more than yours," he says to Frederick Douglass. Douglass says, "Sir, it was a sacred effort."

CHANDRA MANNING:

I think everything about that vignette is important. That Douglass went to the White House for the second inauguration would've been pretty hard to imagine Frederick Douglass in even 1860 ... certainly, 1856 or 1854. He went with the expectation of attending. That expectation is important. He was barred at the door. That's important, too, that for all the expectation and for all the tumult and all the change, there were still powerful forces barring him at the door. But, he called on Lincoln. He called on the president, and the president allied with him, not the forces barring him at the door.

CHANDRA MANNING:

And then, they exchanged ideas about the second inaugural address. I don't think there's any reason to doubt Lincoln when he said he really wanted to know Frederick Douglass' opinion about that address. I think that's important. We see there a recognition that I don't think we see in Lincoln earlier, that what this man thinks matters, that some of the value of the second inaugural address, of what this speech said, some of that value lies in whether it resonated with Douglass or not. There is a moral authority awarded to Douglass in 1864 that I don't think we see Abraham Lincoln in 1860 awarding to an African-American man. Again, they only met three times. But, these three interactions do encapsulate, I think, a change that we see in Lincoln and also help explain that change. That change is, in part, the result of actual interactions with people as opposed to an intellectualizing or an abstraction of an issue versus an interaction with a person.

Lincoln: leader or follower

01:18:40:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

Was Lincoln a leader or a follower on the question of emancipation? Lincoln was a man who I think fully understood and embodied the notion of leading from behind. Lincoln needed to be pulled to some degree, in terms of pace, in terms of scope, and in terms of what emancipation actually meant. Did it mean just the end of the legal institution of slavery? Or, did it mean an elevation to legal personhood, to membership within the body politic for those who had been enslaved?

CHANDRA MANNING:

Lincoln needed to be pulled on some of those things, and he was pulled on some of those things. And, therein lies some of his greatness as a leader, and that was his ability and willingness to be pulled. But, there are also ways in which Lincoln is doing the pulling. Lincoln has a truly quite ingenious grasp on the mechanisms of politics and how to get things done within a legal constitutional system. He is leading, certainly, a segment of the Northern public to come along with him further than perhaps that Northern public was interested in going, towards not just an end to slavery, but a constitutional amendment to end slavery, for example. Let's bear in mind that the United States has not amended the Constitution other than the Bill of Rights any more than twice by this point, so Lincoln is talking about doing something pretty radical here. He's pulling the public behind with him in terms of the Constitution as an instrument to end slavery.

CHANDRA MANNING:

He is neither a reluctant Johnny-come-lately to the notion of emancipation, dragged kicking and screaming when all he wanted was a Union, and

nevermind this slavery stuff. That's not Lincoln. Nor is he a brilliant foresighted genius who was born in 1809 with a perfectly laid out plan that was going to magically evaporate the institution overnight. He was neither of those things. He was a flawed human being who, from the outset, wanted the institution of slavery to be set on a path to extinction, who thought at first that path was going to have to be slow and painstaking, who had his mind changed during the war about the pace that path could take, and who was at the forefront of ensuring that change be situated not alongside what the United States was and what saving the Union meant, but at the heart of what saving the Union meant. On that, I believe he led.

Lincoln the "master" politician

01:21:54:00

CHANDRA MANNING:

Of course, another factor of Lincoln was he was really good at politics. He made a mistake or two, a miscalculation here and there, but one of the reasons why they stand out to us, one of the reasons why we talk about how he got the Southern population so wrong, is because it was really out of character. I mean, the man was very, very good at wire-pulling. He knew what made Washington work. He knew what made Congress tick. He understood in particular how partisan politics worked. He understood that politics wasn't some vapor that floats over the Potomac. Politics was person to person actually doing things, was person to person actually making decisions, was getting votes, that it took votes to change things, that it took votes to make a certain policy palatable or not.

When we call Lincoln a master politician, in one sense, that sounds like a putdown. But, in another sense, it was entirely necessary because it was not the case that there had never been anyone who wanted an end to slavery. It was not the case that there had never been anyone with moral vision before. But, somebody who could ally a moral case for the ending of slavery with the actual mechanical levers of power to make it happen, that is one of the things that's truly distinctive about Lincoln. Sometimes it makes him look a little bit distasteful. I will not lie there. And, sometimes he was a little crass. Sometimes he was more politician than statesman, as we might say. But, at the end of the day, the genius to move political levers of power in the direction of the angels might be one of his greatest practical legacies.

CHANDRA MANNING:

The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, again, it certainly didn't single-handedly write all the wrongs piled up by generations of enslavement. It was no silver bullet, for sure. But, it was a radical change. Again, the Constitution had almost never been amended by Americans up to that point. There was the first 10 Bill of Rights, and then they mostly left it alone except for twice. So, to use the Constitution to end slavery, that is close to revolutionary. To pull it off required, in part, convincing people that it wasn't such a revolution after all, and Lincoln was a genius at that. Lincoln was a genius at advancing a position that really was quite revolutionary specifically by convincing opinion that it wasn't such a big change. They were already there after all. I can't think of anybody as good at that as Abraham Lincoln.

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