KELLIE CARTER JACKSON
LINCOLN'S DILEMMA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Kellie Carter Jackson Interview
06-29-2021
Interviewed by Jackie Olive & Barak Goodman
Total Running Time: 01:06:48

START TC: 01:00:00:00

CREW MEMBER:

Kellie Carter Jackson interview. Take one. Marker.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Kellie Carter Jackson

HISTORIAN, WELLESLEY COLLEGE

Lincoln's primary goal of unification

00:00:13:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
So Lincoln's very intent about being a unifier. He wants to bring the country back together again. His primary goal is solidarity. So if he can do that by abolishing the institution of slavery, he'll do that. If he can bring the country back together again by maintaining slavery, he'll do that as well.

“There was no childhood for an enslaved person”

00:00:37:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Frederick Douglass is both the exception and the rule. He's the exception in that he is this enslaved person who goes on to escape the institution, gain his freedom, and become one of the most famous people in the 19th century. But before he can get to that freedom, he is the rule. And that means that him, like so many other millions of enslaved Black children, were not considered human beings. In essence, there was no such thing as a Black child, you were just a Black laborer, a Black enslaved person. And as young as five or seven years old, you could find yourself in the field, picking cotton, in the kitchen, assisting with meals. You could be subject to violence at a very young age.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
If you were a young girl, the moment you hit puberty, and oftentimes before you hit puberty, you were vulnerable to sexual assault, and not only sexual assault, but you were commissioned to have as many children as possible with very little breaks in between pregnancy, so that you could be 17 or 18 years old and have three children or four children. There was no such thing as a childhood for Black children. They saw their mothers beat, their fathers beat, their siblings beat. They saw their loved ones sold away from them. And they were also subject to that same sort of violence. There's no moments, as an enslaved person, in which you have a reprieve or a break or a kind word or an act of humanity that would supersede the condition that you were in. So when Frederick Douglass describes his childhood, he's not just describing what he's

experienced, but what so many other millions of Black people experienced from womb to tomb.

Emancipation is the first step and full equality is the goal

00:02:44:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Emancipation is really about beginnings, not ends. So when we think about what it means to abolish the institution of slavery, that's a first step. So much has to take place after that and a big part of that is equality. So one of the ways that I talk about Black abolitionists and Black leadership is that they're not just pushing for emancipation. Their goals are twofold. They want emancipation and equality. And they see the two ideas as tethered to one another so that you can't have equality without emancipation. You can't have emancipation without equality. But these are the first steps to gaining liberation for Black people to securing their humanity, to securing their rights and their citizenship of this country.

The importance of citizenship

01:03:36:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Citizenship was so important to the abolitionist movement. When you think about the fact that free northerners are not really free because they don't have citizenship. When Frederick Douglass tries to travel outside of the country, he's going to Europe, and he tries to come back in the country and they're like, "Oh, your passport is not valid. You're not a citizen." And he's like, "What do you mean I'm not a citizen?" But the *Dred Scott* Case, the Supreme court decision,

Dred Scott in 1857, basically said that Black people had no rights, which white men were bound to respect, and that Black people were not citizens and so that they couldn't sue and they couldn't testify and they couldn't serve on juries. So citizenship was essential to establishing Black humanity in the United States.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Rights have to be protected. And so in order to claim citizenship, what does that entail? Well, it entails protection. It entails protection from the state. It ensures that, you know, your vote will count. Harm that's committed against you will be held accountable. It means that assets that you own or land that you own will be protected. So there's so much about citizenship and rights that go hand in hand that Black people can't really experience freedom until that is secured by the federal government, their state governments and their local governments as well.

00:05:02:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Free Black people were not citizens. Not until you get the 14th amendment do you get citizenship for Black Americans. So even though you were born in this country, you could live and die in this country and you would not legally be considered a citizen. Mobility is so important in understanding citizenship and vice versa. So free Black people can't move about the country the way that white Americans can. If you were a free Black person living in Massachusetts, if you were a sailor, you might not be allowed off the ship if you were to port in Charleston or port in New Orleans. And so it's so important that Black people have these protections so that they won't face kidnapping so that they won't face incarceration when they come and travel to the South. And there were a lot of instances in which Black sailors in particular are traveling to Washington D.C., to Virginia, to various places in the South and they're concerned that if they get

off the ship, if they dock, they will be arrested. Or in some cases certain Southern states said that if you were a free Black person and you were a sailor, you would have to go to jail and stay in jail until your ship was ready to leave again. Then you could get back on the ship and you had to leave, but you weren't allowed to move within Southern spaces as a free Black person.

The tension between Lincoln's personal beliefs and political reality

00:06:27:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Lincoln, throughout the Civil War, is very much conflicted. He is not necessarily clear in where he stands regarding the institution of slavery. He knows that he hates it personally, but politically he's trying to reconcile how he should make decisions about keeping the institution or eradicating it altogether. And this is where you see a lot of the tension throughout Lincoln's political and personal maneuverings is because he's trying to navigate the world of abolishing the institution of slavery, an institution that he hates. And also trying to give the South their own autonomy as states that are a part of the Union.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Lincoln is at war with himself over the purpose of the war, the meaning of the war. How to make sense of what direction he should take in bringing the country back together. Lincoln is in some ways the quintessential politician. He is trying to understand one side of his Republican party that is very much anti-slavery, but not necessarily abolitionist. And then he's also trying to reconcile with the radical Republicans who want to push very progressive legislation in terms of Black equality, Black citizenship, Black humanity, really establishing that. And so he's trying to walk this line of how much do I give to

each faction and how do I please each faction? And in that sense, you know, he has to be extremely diplomatic.

00:08:03:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Lincoln is completely inconsistent, but that's completely consistent with who people are in general. I think people are complicated. People are complicated and people evolve and they change and get stubborn, but people can also unstick themselves. And so what I've always appreciated about Lincoln is his ability to pivot politically and personally. What I've also been disappointed in Lincoln is his inability to pivot politically and personally when it was needed. Lincoln is imperfect, but he strives for perfection and I think that's what we can all appreciate about him.

Lincoln's gradual evolution toward emancipation

00:08:48:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
The change for Abraham Lincoln comes when he realizes that he's not going to be able to unify the country without abolishing the institution of slavery. So in order to bring the country together, again, he has to have emancipation. This is how emancipation becomes not just a military necessity, but a political necessity. In some ways it's because of the enslaved themselves, meaning slavery dies on the ground. Enslaved people see the writing on the wall and they are leaving the plantation in droves.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
And Lincoln, this is one thing that Lincoln can't sort of get around is that every time he tries to, like, send enslaved property back to their plantations or the

Union Army comes in and enslaved people run to the Union Army and Lincoln's like, "No, don't free them. Don't free them." And his generals like, "Well, what do you want us to do with them? You know, we can't stop this train." And when Lincoln realizes that he can't stop this train, and most importantly, or equally importantly, that his generals are also in favor, are on the side of the enslaved people saying, " It's their right. This is their liberation. And they are seizing it." He has to act accordingly. And so emancipation becomes very much a part of the new narrative, the new shift in how we understand bringing the country together, creating citizenship for Black people and freedom for Black people.

Military enforcement of emancipation

00:10:18:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
The military is so important in that Lincoln's generals have a major role in expediting the liberation that enslaved people have so that when the Union Army shows up, it's a signal to people who are enslaved. "Okay, now we can leave. And not only can we leave, but we will be supported when we leave. That our masters can't keep us on the land when the Union army is here to enforce their surrender." And so the military is the one way that enslaved people could really enact on the claims of the emancipation proclamation, because otherwise you had no one there to enforce it. The military had to enforce it. And so this is why Lincoln's generals, I think, are so important at implementing the beginnings of what becomes emancipation.

Lincoln's treatment of Native Americans

00:11:14:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
I think that oftentimes when we think about the moment of the 1860s, we are consumed with the Civil War. So we don't think anything else is happening. And a lot of other things are happening particularly out in the west, particularly in Native American lands. So I often think that this is a narrative that gets forgotten or left out the story, because we only think about the Civil War. I also think that we only think of Lincoln as this "great emancipator," that we don't have a narrative of him that extends to other marginalized groups like the native Americans. And so how he handles this, I think is very important because the way that Black people and Indigenous people are treated in this country, really sort of is like the canary in the coal mine for how we think about race relations going forward. And so the way that he handles Native Americans, in some sense, there's empathy, there's compassion and in another sense, there's complete extermination. And I think these two ideas are something that we have to hold together collectively to think about what it means to do this compassionate act and this really barbaric act all in the same space, all encompassed by the same person.

Differing views within the Confederacy

00:12:38:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Everyone is not in lockstep with Jefferson Davis. I think that's important to understand. There is sort of the idea that's been perpetuated that this is a rich man's war and a poor man's fight, and that there are definitely people who want to keep slavery, who want to keep their enslaved property, but there are also

people that want to still be a part of the Union and don't understand what a world would look like inside the Confederacy. So there are a lot of different factions, and you even have, you know, Southern slaveholders and people who are Southerners, but not necessarily slaveholders, who are trying to make sense of the chaos around them, the intense violence and death all around them. And for a lot of people, they're questioning the validity, or at least the purpose of this war and how it might serve them in the end. And if it will at all.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
I think that there's a tendency to either dismiss the South as like "Oh, you slaveholders," or to sort of see the South as this solidified block that is so monolith and so non-diverse in terms of its thinking that it's just one thing and only one thing, this very one dimensional way of looking at Southerners. And I think it's important that we complicate, not only the region, but the people within the region, and understand that this is such a long history, such a diverse history, and there's so many different perspectives that have been heard, but also silenced in this moment to pursue a particular narrative about what the South is or should represent.

00:14:29:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
And so I think that there are definitely people that get lost in that. You know, the enslaved, first and foremost, I think get lost in that narrative. We don't hear their voices the way that we need to. We don't center their voices the way that we should. I think women get left out of that category as well. I think poor people, poor white farmers who are not slaveholders, definitely get left out of that narrative. And so, you know, I'm always trying to push back in my classes that the South is not *Gone with the Wind*, that not every place is Tara or some

sort of mythical plantation, that a lot of it is, you know, very difficult to swallow I think if people were to have an honest examination of what the South was.

Shifting tides in the Civil War

00:15:21:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
The war ebbs and flows. So- and when I say ebbs and flows, I mean there are times when it seems like the Union might lose, and there are times when it seems like the Union might win. And so each battle is so pivotal in moving us closer toward what might be liberation or closer toward what might be chattel slavery for all of the Confederacy forever. So there is a moment though, I think, in 1864 as we get to the close of the Civil War, they don't realize it's the close of the Civil War, where the South is completely vulnerable and on the verge of collapse, and they have lost a lot. And so 1864 is right on the cusp of that.

Views of Lincoln among enslaved people

00:16:09:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
So enslaved people don't really look at Lincoln in the same way that we do today. I think there is a lot of, understandably so, martyr-fication of Lincoln. We look at him almost in a saintlike kind of way. Enslaved people have multiple ideas about Lincoln. There is, to some extent, there is admiration and there is a sense of pride or loyalty when thinking about Lincoln. For others, there's a deep sense of distrust. Most Black people did not trust any white person, particularly white people in power. Harriet Tubman is a perfect example of that. You know, it

took her friend, Sojourner Truth, to sort of convince her, like "No, Lincoln is a good man. You can trust him. Where Harriet Tubman sort of, you know, pivots the way that she thought about him, but when she thought about Lincoln, she was like, "I don't think he's particularly for us. You know, when I think about Lincoln, I think about the fact that Black soldiers are being paid half the wages that white soldiers are being paid."

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
So there is this array of thoughts and feeling about Lincoln, but one thing I can say for sure is that when Lincoln is assassinated, there is a lot of tethering his death, his violent death, to Blackness, and to the idea of what it means to be a Black person in America, which is to be someone who is highly hated, and at the same time also, you know, exploited. So I think that, you know, it's difficult. When I think about his death, I think that we have made Lincoln into something else much later, like each generation has a different sort of version of Lincoln. And I think those who lived in the moment in which he died have a much different version than those who are thinking about him two, three generations out.

Lincoln considers allowing Black veterans to vote

00:18:16:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
If you think about the fact that there are 4 million Black people who are enslaved, a little over 200,000 Black men fight for the Union. That's a very small percentage, and that's not giving account to the free Black people who are living in the North. So when we think about freedom, we have to think about a baseline that benefits everyone. Not a select few, not just men, not just the

wealthy, not just those who fought, but everyone. If you can't create a system that works for everyone you can't create real freedom.

The slow pace of Lincoln's shift in thinking

00:19:01:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
The biggest grievance I have with Lincoln is probably his first inaugural address. When, you know, the country is falling apart and his number one goal is to, in essence, preserve the institution of slavery, to maintain things like the Fugitive Slave Law, to give the South as many concessions as possible in order to keep them in the Union. And it flies in the face of all of the concessions that were won by a slave holding South, all of the legislation that passed, that benefited them. The south is constantly getting perks as well, legislative political parks, to maintain slavery. And so I would have hoped that at the start of the war he would have seen earlier how much abolishing the institution of slavery would have been instrumental in not just stopping the war, but maybe ending it earlier. I mean, could you imagine the Civil War were just a year or two years, instead of the several years that it took, how many lives might've been spared? I mean, we can't do these counterfactuals, but I think about that when I think about how long it takes someone to shift in their thinking.

The importance of federal action on behalf of Black Americans

00:20:22:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:

I can't imagine what the world would look like if power were left in the hands of local and state officials to do right by Black people. When I think about all of the major changes that have had progressive positive impacts on African-Americans' livelihood, it has come at the federal level. It has come at the federal level because it has to be instituted for all. And so if Lincoln had not taken Douglass' advice, I don't know what that world would look like. I don't know how things would shift, but I can tell you it would not be good for African-Americans.

The passage of the 13th Amendment

00:21:08:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Gosh. I can't imagine the kind of jubilance that Black people especially had with the passing of the 13th amendment, and what it meant to know that slavery was forever abolished, that it was not just a law, but a constitutional amendment. Sometimes I get overwhelmed in thinking about that moment, because as a historian I'm always looking... It sounds morbid, but I'm always looking at death dates. You know, I'm always looking to see, like, who survived, who made it, who got to this moment, who got to experience this kind of, you know, thrill of freedom. So I imagine that's a moment that Charles would have very much wanted to spend with his father. I think about, you know, big moments in my own life in which you wish you could be with your family members to celebrate, to talk about it, to sort of even joke and laugh about it. I mean, that's a really special moment. There is another moment that I think of, too. I think it's when Frederick Douglass comes back to his hometown in Maryland, and he's visiting a church to let them know that either it's the emancipation proclamation has

been passed or the 13th Amendment has passed, but he comes before this Black congregation to tell them that freedom is at hand.

00:22:31:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
And he does this in a beautiful way in which he tells a biblical story of Noah and how, during the flood, the biblical flood of Noah, Noah sends out a dove to give a sign that there's land, that the flooding has subsided. And the dove comes back with, like, a stick in its hand to show that, like, the water is subsiding and that change is happening and all of that. And Douglass comes back and he says to the audience, "I am the dove. I am the dove. I am here to tell you that things are changing and that the waters have subsided, and that there is a hope and a future for you now." I don't know. I get really passionate about thinking about those moments.

Optimism during Reconstruction

00:23:20:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
During Reconstruction African-Americans saw the most progress in a short amount of time than we have ever seen in American history. Nowhere else in the western hemisphere do you have a group of people who go from being enslaved to being senators, to being elected officials, to having no citizenship and then becoming citizens and voting, and educating themselves and educating their children. It is rapid progress in a very short amount of time. The things that Black people were able to do with nothing, literally nothing, to educate themselves, to create banks, to create schools, to create businesses, to farm their own land, to generate wealth for the next generations. That, to me, is probably one of the most powerful historical moments in American history, next to

Barack Obama's presidency. I can't think of any other period. And there's a great quote – it's in Ta-Nehisi Coates' book – but it's a Senator from the South and he says, you know "We were eight years in power. And then during those eight years we built schools, we built roads, we, you know, built sanitation, and centers for the elderly and for the infirmed. We put the country back on the road toward progress." And that, to me, it's so encouraging. It's so incredible.

Black Union soldiers freeing enslaved people

00:25:05:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
The best example that I can think of of Black soldiers meeting up with enslaved people would be when Harriet Tubman leads a blitz ... I don't know if it's called platoon or what the technical, the military term would be. When Harriett Tubman leads a group of men to South Carolina on the Combahee River. And this is when she frees about 800 people, that there are troops from the North, part of the Massachusetts 54th and 55th Black, all-Black regiments are there. And I imagine that that moment must have been life-changing for so many people who see, not just the Union line, but Black soldiers at the helm of that Union line and are running to safety as fast as they possibly can. There's sort of a tragic story in that, in which enslaved people are running to Union lines and Confederate soldiers are shooting at them as they're running away. And there is ... And I'm not sure, I want to double check because I'm not sure how apocryphal this story is, but there is a story of an enslaved woman who is running to get to the Union soldiers and she's carrying a child in her hands and she gets shot in the back, and basically throws the child to another person and says, "Make sure that this child, you know, gets freedom. Make sure this child grows up in freedom." And I mean, that's how, like, razor thin the edge was from

enslavement to freedom and what it meant to cross those lines and to see Black soldiers as a refuge, even if you couldn't quite get there, knowing that that was coming for you, I think, is monumental.

Challenging stereotypical images of Black people in the 19th century

00:26:58:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
So whenever you look at images of Black people in the 19th century, you have to be careful to understand that– what you're looking at. Oftentimes people drew images of Black people that weren't realistic images of Black people. They were either, like sambos or pickaninnies or what we would call like, sort of, the minstrel era, and that you have these very cartoon-esque stereotypical versions of Black people that are not based in fact, are not based in reality. And I think these images are prevalent throughout the North and the South. The idea of a Black person as lazy or a Black woman as hypersexual or a Black child as a pickaninny. All of these ideas are running rampant in the North and the South and throughout the 19th century. So it's really important when someone like Edmonia Lewis comes on the scene and she starts using her art to present Black people in a very realistic way, to make portraits and busts of Black people that show them in all their humanity. You know, she's very careful to make these realistic, very specific ways of thinking about Black features and Black identity and giving them an identity in art that feels admirable and honorable and true. That authenticity in her art is so important. And she's doing that in a moment where it's not really appreciated until long after the 19th century. We don't get great depictions of what Black people look like, outside of photography, for a long time.

Former enslavers' and planters' identities after the Civil War

00:29:00:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
So many enslavers, nearly all enslavers, staked so much of their identity in owning other Black people. And so when the war comes to a close and the 13th Amendment is ratified, and Southern states can't come back into the Union until they have ratified the 13th amendment, until they have committed to the abolition of slavery, most white slave holders or planters don't know how to live in a world that won't allow them to exploit Black people or to get their wealth from Black labor. But most importantly, they can't reconcile a world in which Black people are equal to them, Black people can vote and marry and have a say, in which they have to pay a wage, you know, for a Black person who would be working for them. I think there's a real identity crisis that white slave holders have during this moment. But I think that identity crisis is short-lived because only in about a decade or two, you see everyone who lost power because of the Civil War, slowly regains it again. And we have a different version of what slavery is through share cropping, through contract labor, through these very exploitative practices. But I would say it's only a short period in which white former slaveholders are thinking about how they might navigate their lives. That's where you get the genesis of the Ku Klux Klan through a lot of this political economic angst about what standing white people will have. But I think all of that is ... All of the power that was lost is quickly given back to them within one generation.

The end of Reconstruction

00:30:59:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Part of it is that you have this intense, very close political campaign for the presidency. And the compromise that is given to the South benefits them in so many ways, in which they now can have Union troops removed from Southern premises, removed from plantations. They no longer have the military oversight that was keeping a lot of this racial aggression in check and these racial riots in check. And they have political power. They have positions in Rutherford B. Hayes' cabinet. They have a guarantee by the federal government that the government will invest funds to restore the South and to build railway lines through the South and industrialize the South and bring the South up to speed. So I say all this to say that the South gets a lot of concessions, so much so that it doesn't necessarily have to forfeit very much going forward. Even when it comes to their labor, they still have Black people working for them for menial wages, sometimes still no wages.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
The main people who are advocating for Black protection are the radical abolitionists, the radical Republicans who are in office. But by the time you get to the end of the Civil War and the start of Reconstruction, certainly the end of Reconstruction, these advocates for Black freedom and for Black protection are old and are dying off. And the North has sort of grown tired of making concessions or what it believes is making concessions for Black people.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
And so there's no longer this moral impetus to try to get Black people squarely on their feet. The impetus is to make sure that the South never leaves the Union

again. "How can we ensure that they won't leave? Let's make sure that they have every single thing that they need."

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
And because the South was based on a system of exploitative violent labor, so much of that returns, because so much of the Confederacy was based on ideas about white supremacy. Much of that returns and remains a staple in terms of how we think about reconstruction. So for Black people to have gotten any real progressive change is a feat in and of itself. But I never thought, and through my research have never really seen that Black progressive legislation was put at the forefront in ways that white supremacy was. At the forefront was always the preservation of white supremacy, even in the North so that whatever Black people got was really a major coup if you think about how much people were invested in protecting their racial supremacy, politically and economically and socially.

The Red Summer of 1919

00:34:04:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
1919 marks a tumultuous year in which Black people are being inundated by violence, white, terroristic, supremacist violence. And you see a wave, particularly in the summer of 1919, of violent attacks on Black communities. You see massive riots that take place in Chicago, for instance. I hesitate to even call them riots because so much of the violence is really one sided, in which you have large groups of Black people that are empowered by the local and state officials to enact this violence. And there are Black people who fight back. There are Black people who use guns and force and violence to fight back. But they are

not equipped in the way that other white Americans are. And they're, most importantly, are not supported by, like, these policing forces that are so on the side of white supremacy at this time. A lot of 1919 and the riots are ... The reasons are several fold. I would say part of it is because the Great Migration in which you have millions of Black Southerners who are leaving the South in droves to inhabit Northern cities like Chicago and Boston and Philadelphia and Jersey, and what have you. And as a result of this influx of Black people coming into these populations, coming into these urban centers, you have a policing force that is now responsible for, like, that influx of Black people. And so a lot of these major grievances, you'll notice that the police are almost always involved. Police brutality of some sort is almost always involved. Labor issues are almost a huge deal.

00:35:57:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
And then also World War I, you have Black veterans that have fought overseas, served their country, come back home, only to find that no one wants to see a Black man in a uniform, much less with an arm, with a gun, or some sort of protection on them. No one wants to see a Black man who is emboldened and wants to purchase a home and make a living and operate outside of the white supremacy that they had been living in for so long. So there's a lot of labor tensions. There's a lot of, you know, economic resentment, political resentment, political control, policing is another form of control. And it culminates in a lot of ways in 1919 and continues forward. But I think 1919 is a pivotal year in which you see a lot of Black successful towns that get destroyed. Tulsa gets destroyed. Places in Arkansas get destroyed. I think Elaine, Arkansas. I think about Rosewood, Florida. I think about the South Side of Chicago. And a huge part of that is economic backlash too. These towns were successful. And I think Black people made themselves targets of the Klan when they did the one thing that

white people never wanted to see, which was they defied white supremacy by improving themselves and by becoming successful, and by becoming prosperous, they defied all of the tenets of white supremacy, which is, "No, we are not lazy. No, we are not stupid. Yes, we can make money and save it and do well." And so a lot of those riots are a result of that resentment.

00:37:48:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
The violence is rampant. There are over three dozen cities that experience drastic white supremacist terrorism, Black businesses are destroyed. Black schools are destroyed. Black homes are burned down. There are Black people that are assaulted on the street, that are murdered on the street. All of this is during a time in which Black people had a moment of cultural and social progress because of, in some ways, because of segregation, right?. They managed to have these communities that became very self-sufficient and very successful. And they lost a lot in 1919 as a result of economic competition and economic resentment.

Challenging the false narrative about race and crime

00:38:47:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Khalil Gibran Muhammad talks about this in his book, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, where he says, "When you think about the 13th Amendment, yes, it abolishes slavery. But there's also this caveat that talks about criminality, that slavery is actually okay if you commit a crime." So what we see in 1896 is that Black people are about 10% of the population and 30% of the prison population. So one of the ways that Black people were perpetually exploited is through Black criminality and the criminal justice system, so that when you

think about the 19th century and the 20th century, and even in the 21st century, Black criminality plays a major role in how Black people experience their citizenship. And so it's Khalil Gibran Muhammad who has this great quote where he says "The underlying myth or idea is that white people commit crimes, but Black people are criminals. White people commit crimes, but Black people are criminals," meaning a white person can commit a crime, but that's not who they are, right? They're more than that. They're an athlete. They're someone's son. They have a future. You know what I mean? But when we think about Black people, regardless of whether or not they have committed a crime, their identity is based in that criminality. And if you can't operate outside of being a criminal, then your options are limited, drastically limited in terms of what your future might look like for you. And I think we're still dealing with that narrative today of white people can commit crimes, but Black people are criminals. Their very Blackness is a threat. Regardless of what they're doing, people are afraid to somehow engage with Blackness or that engaging in Blackness you're somehow like, I don't know, engaging in criminal acts.

The importance of Lincoln second-guessing himself

00:40:52:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Lincoln was never very sure or certain about what he should do about Black people. You know, he thought, "Well, we can't possibly all live in this same country together, share this existence together. We can't possibly imagine what equality would look like. Some of his ideas were to ship Black people overseas, out of the country, to send them back to Africa or send them to the West Indies. He didn't have a whole lot of good plans about what freedom would look like,

nor did I think he understood the gravity of what was required to bring about freedom. And so I think we could have a very different country, had it not been for his ability to think differently and think deeply about what freedom meant for Black people. I don't think he realized how much Black people had an allegiance to this country, that they were born here, that this was the only country that they ever knew, and that they were not interested in leaving. Many Black people didn't want to go to Canada. They didn't want to go to Haiti. They had no idea of what Africa looked like to them, or Liberia, specifically. So, you know, I think that had Lincoln not sort of played out these ideas, at least in his head or with his counselors about what's possible, we could have a very different America.

Enslaved people took and fought for their freedom

00:42:30:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
It bothers me to sum up this entire history with the one line like "Lincoln freed the slaves." The slaves freed themselves. The slaves freed themselves. They took their freedom. It wasn't given to them. They fought for their freedom. Many Black men fought for that freedom and changed the tide of the war into a Union victory because of Black soldiers. Black men and women and children left, sometimes with Union protection, but not always. And so I push back hard on that narrative and I'm not alone in that. I think most historians have a consensus about who freed the slaves and that's the enslaved themselves. Slavery dies on the ground. When I look at the 13th Amendment, I look at it like a coroner's report. It's the official time of death. But slavery was already dead and gone. And there was no way that Lincoln or anyone else could have reversed that. And so I think it's important for people to understand that

nothing in history is that simplistic. Nothing in history comes down to one man or one person or one thing. That history is complicated, and that we do best to learn history when we give people their agency and when we refuse to look at anyone or anything as a monolith or a one-dimensional factor.

The "spirit of slavery" lives on today

01:44:07:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
If the South had won the war... I mean, these are things that like we can think about because they lost. But I think in some ways the South won the war ideologically. They won the war culturally. In some ways, they won it historically. I think the South has done an incredible job at winning the intellectual victory in the Civil War. And what I mean by that is long after the Civil War ended, so much of the literature, the history, the textbooks, everything that we understood about the Civil War was filtered through the planter's perspective, through the master's perspective, through a white supremacist lens. And that's a battle that we are still as scholars and as lay people still fighting, still legislating against. So I think that the battle is ongoing. I think that Black people may have abolished the institution of slavery, but like Joshua Easton says, a famous Black abolitionist, the spirit of slavery is still there.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
And he says, you can abolish slavery, but if you don't reckon with the spirit of slavery, you will always have it with us. So when I look at mass incarceration I see the spirit of slavery. When I look at the pandemic I see the spirit of slavery. When I look at segregation I see the spirit of slavery. I see all of these caveats or maybe reincarnations of the institution showing itself in different ways. I see it

with the latest battle on critical race theory. So I'm not confident that, like, "war is won, folks" like I think the physical fighting may have stopped, but I can't even say that because I look at January 6th and I'm like "oh my god, we are still fighting, we are still embattled over power and progress, and who gets it, and how fast and how soon." No, I don't think that the war is over, at least not intellectually, or ideologically, or culturally. So I don't give the what-ifs too much credence because we're still sort of living in that moment. At least I am. And I know a lot of other Black people are still living in that moment of trying to reconcile "what is the victory." So yeah, that's all I'll add to that.

The Black Codes

00:47:03:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
The Black Codes don't just pop out of nowhere. There's a long history with Black restrictions when it comes to the law and how the law is implemented on Black people. So we are pretty much familiar with the slave codes within the context of slavery, that enslaved people couldn't read or write or gather in large groups. There's so many restrictions that are put on Black people within that institution. But what people often don't realize is that there are very similar restrictions in the North as well. Predominantly restrictions that control movement. Some states before they became states and they were territories banned African-Americans from entering. Illinois had banned Black people. Ohio had banned Black people. Ohio had laws that basically said Black people couldn't own land unless another white person vouch for them. Many Northern states had laws that said Black people could not serve on juries. Black people could not give witness or testimony. Black people could not sue in a court of law. Black people could not travel to slave states or had to get permission in order to

travel. There were so many restrictions put on Black mobility and Black political power. You could not vote unless you owned a certain amount of land. So these Black Codes made it really difficult to decipher the difference between being a free person and being an enslaved person when you were Black, because you still had no protections, you still had no rights. And these rights don't get implemented until you get the Reconstruction period with the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendment. But free Black people in the North are living in a very precarious life that essentially guarantees them nothing.

The importance of legal precedence

00:49:04:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Black people, freed Black people are trying to use the court system to advocate for themselves. They're trying to get white Northerners to buy in to their citizenship and to their protection and the idea that they should have rights. And so you see a lot of seminal court cases that are happening throughout the North that are meant to push the solidification of Black citizenship or a consensus around citizenship. This is why the 14th amendment is so important. Black activism wasn't just about abolishing the institution of slavery, it was also about creating protections that would be there for them when liberation came so that you would have some sort of understanding, legal understanding and equal protection under the law when it came to emancipation. So out in California, Mary Ellen Pleasant is fighting these battles. She's fighting battles over train segregation, she's fighting battles over, you know, how Black people can move or what property they can own. There are many cases of Black women who sued in court, who tried to either sue for their freedom or try to also sue for their protection so that they couldn't have their loved ones thrown in jail

because they went to a Southern or slave-holding state. So there are a lot of these court cases, I think, really crescendo with the 14th amendment, but that advocacy has a long history.

00:50:35:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
I think that we think of Lincoln as this abolitionist, but he was not. Because he was anti-slavery, he had not really thought through all of the political, economic and even moral implications of what abolitionist meant, like an abolitionist had. And so when you think about these radical Republicans, they're so instrumental because someone like Charles Sumner, who was a lawyer, or Wendell Phillips had been working on cases like these, advocating for rights for free Black people for a very, very long time. So when Lincoln's doing it, he has to do it under duress, you know, because of the Civil War. But these are, you know, this activist work was something that white, radical abolitionists had been pushing through for a long time.

The myth of Lincoln as the "great emancipator"

00:51:32:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
Because emancipation is the beginning, emancipation does not die with Lincoln. And I think that's important to understand because we have connected Lincoln so much to this persona of the "great emancipator," that when he's assassinated, we tend to question the institution of freedom in and of itself. Is freedom now at risk because Lincoln is no longer with us? Freedom was never about Lincoln. Emancipation and liberation was never about Lincoln. It's so bigger than that. So much bigger than that. And I think we see how much bigger that freedom

really was when we think about this period of reconstruction in which Black people are advocating for themselves and other radical white abolitionists are advocating for their humanity and for their rights way beyond what Lincoln had ever imagined.

Correcting the narrative that all people want to protect themselves

00:52:34:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
I teach a course on slavery and film. And one of the movies we watch is *Glory*, which came out in 1989 was meant to highlight Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th and 55th All-Black regiments. And I think that we do have this tendency to look at Black people as like magical or supernatural. "Oh my gosh, look at their amazing courage." And I don't want to dismiss that. I think it took large amounts of courage and bravery to come from a free society like Massachusetts or a free state like Massachusetts and fight on behalf of the enslaved. I don't want to belittle that bravery or that courage, but I also think it's important to understand that Black people are not special in their attempts to seek out freedom. That all people, when they are exploited, when they are subjugated to violence, resist that violence, that it is in our human DNA to want to defend ourselves, to want to protect ourselves, to want to preserve ourselves. And so I don't think that Black people are exceptional in that way. I think that those desires to protect and preserve are innate. But I do think that, you know, when anyone is faced with the barrel of a gun and out-manned or out-supplied, that you have to pull from a certain place within yourself to want to keep fighting and to want to keep going. When I think of Fort Wagner, and I think about how courageous Black people and Black soldiers had to be to maintain that Fort, and

simultaneously, you know, underpaid and under equipped. It's an enormous feat, even in its failure.

The importance of collective effort

00:54:39:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
I just read an article about arson and how fires were such a weapon of the enslaved. And there's an enslaved man who talks about the joy that he had in like burning it all down. But, like, I mean, there is- I think that there's this really problematic idea that if Black people wanted to rise up, they could have just done it, you know? Maybe it wasn't that bad if they didn't rise up. But then there's this also other side of that, which is that Black people are so exceptional and so magical, and so, you know, that they could overthrow it all by themselves. And that's just not true, either. There's constant resistance, but it also requires a collective effort to overhaul something like the institution of slavery. So it's yes and no and both and neither.

The Freedman's Memorial

00:55:44:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
I've always had an issue with the statue, but I appreciate it because it's teachable, it's useful. There's a way that we can look at the statue and we can deconstruct all of the things that we see in it, and I think art is never intended for us to just look at it and pass it by. It's meant for us to sit in front of it, to stare at it, and to really think about the message that's trying to be conveyed. And to figure out how we can interpret how we each individually see art in a particular way. So

there are certain statues, and Confederate statues included in this, that I'm conflicted. I'm conflicted over how they're presented. There's sometimes I wish there were a disclaimer underneath the statue that sort of gave you the historical context or gave the viewer the moment in which it's being created and the moment in which we're seeing it right now, a breakdown of that, so that people would be able to understand what was happening in a historical context and why this statue had meaning and who funded the statue and how much did they pay for it, and who created it and what were they thinking when they sculpted it? All of that is so important to understanding art that it's too easy or too simplistic to just sort of dismiss it because we don't like it or because it doesn't fit our cultural narrative anymore. I think art requires that we grapple with it.

00:57:19:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
This statue was funded by Black people, not entirely, but a big portion of it is funded by Black people. Frederick Douglass gives a speech, an unforgettable speech, while the unveiling of the statue takes place, and it sort of baffles my mind because Douglass is standing at the statue and he's like, "We aren't Lincoln's children. We're his stepchildren. You're his real children. You white people really benefited from Lincoln's leadership." And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe that Douglass has the audacity to stand up in front of this unveiling and really truth-tell in this moment." But I wish that people could look at that statue and then read what Douglass said that day, because I think it's so instructive for understanding that Black people were not oblivious or unaware of the politics of what was happening, even in the construction of that statue.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:

The statue is -- I don't know about the dimensions, like how tall it is – but the statue, it's a large sculpture of Abraham Lincoln towering over an enslaved person who is in a kneeling position that has chains around their ankles, chains around their feet. And it looks as though Lincoln is not just sort of towering over them, but sort of presenting this enslaved person with the world, with their freedom. There's a really good art history essay on the sculpture that also talks about how the image and what it looked like, an enslaved person giving Lincoln a shoe shine because they're bent over at his feet. But there's a lot about the image that speaks of subservience and servitude, what it means to be in deep gratitude to Lincoln, and to see Lincoln as the sole emancipator, or the one person responsible for Black liberation. It's also, I think, interesting that Lincoln is, you know, fully clothed and the enslaved person is wearing nothing more than his chains and sort of a loincloth.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
And I wonder, too, if they had, like, sketchings of the statue. I imagine they thought it would probably look completely different than what the final product was. I think of the abolitionists symbol that is the, "Am I not a man and a brother?" It is like a circular emblem of an enslaved man who's kneeling with his chained hands out, like, in prostrate, but out as a way of sort of, like, asking for his liberation. And the top part of the crest said, "Am I not a man?" And the bottom part says, "Am I not a brother?" That was probably one of the most popular symbolic, like, portraits or medallions that was used at the time. So Frederick Douglass and the *National Republican* newspaper in 1876 says, "Admirable as the monument by Mr. Ball in Lincoln park. It does not, as it seems to me, tell the whole truth. And perhaps no one monument could be made to tell

the whole truth of any subject, which it might be designed to illustrate." Facts. Facts.

01:00:52:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
I think Douglass is absolutely right. There is no monument, no portrait, no symbol– There is no one thing that can encapsulate the leadership of Lincoln, the 400 plus years of enslavement of chattel slavery, the amount of death of people that were lost during the Civil War, the casualties of the Civil War. There's no one thing that can encapsulate that. But I think what we can do is we can try to get people to remember things that happened, things that were important, and to think about how these major events, and major people, have an impact on us today.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:
"The negro here, though rising, is still on his knees and nude. What I want to see before I die is a monument representing the negro not crouching on his knees like a four footed animal, but erect on his feet like a man." What I think about when I read a quote like that is so much about the abolitionist movement. It's not necessarily about abolishing the institution of slavery. That's part of it. But the major thrust is Black humanity. Acknowledging, recognizing, affirming Black humanity. Yes, Black people are human beings. And so much of the movement has had to push back on the ideas that Black people aren't people. Even within the abolitionist movement that has been a struggle. So, you know, I talk about this in my classes, that I- one of my professors said that the abolitionist movement was like a free the whales campaign. It's like “free the whales, don't hurt the whales.” But whales can't vote and whales can't marry my daughter and whales aren't people.

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:

And I think that everything that Douglass is saying in that quote is so representative of the fights that Black people have to get their humanity recognized and affirmed. But also nowhere is it seen in which the enslaved took their freedom themselves, that it was not given to them, they took it. They saw the writing on the wall, as I said earlier, and they left the plantation and they fled, and they fought. And to me, I think we are so used to pinpointing, like, major moments to white male leadership and denying Black activism, Black agency, that it dismisses the work of so many people that helped to make slavery a thing of the past. And so, yeah. I mean, there's a lot that goes into that quote, but I think what he is essentially saying is that, like, we forget about... We want to put this all on Lincoln. This is not about Lincoln. Lincoln is not the great emancipator that we all think he is. And I don't think Lincoln himself saw himself in that way.

01:04:14:00

KELLIE CARTER JACKSON:

"Should the rebel say we cease fighting and consent to reunion, but we still claim to hold our slaves. I cannot continue the war in such case. But if the rebels would only cease fighting and consent to reunion on condition that I would stipulate to aid them in re-enslaving the Blacks, I can not do that either. What then? Simply this. We will cease the war, restore the Union, and our remaining dispute about slavery we will submit to the peaceful tribunals of courts and votes. Before these tribunals I would have little fear for those Blacks who shall have actively accepted our promise by coming out from among the enemy. For the rest, I fear their case might not be so clear." So yeah, that's a bad idea. Let me explain why I agree with Douglass, and why Douglass saw that as such a bad idea. Because there were many opportunities in which local states, and even to

some degree the federal level of leadership, political leadership, could have abolished slavery, curbed slavery, undermined slavery. And at every turn, they don't do that. Matter of fact, all throughout the antebellum period, every piece of legislation that comes out is pro-slavery, favors the institution of slavery. So people don't have a moral incentive to do right by Black people. They don't have a political incentive to do right by Black people. They certainly don't have an economic incentive to do right by Black people. And so if not by military force, if not by federal enforcement of things like abolition and citizenship, Black people have no recourse. And so to leave it in the hands of the people that created and promote and benefit from the system is absurd. And so Douglass is pushing back on that because he's like, "You think people are going to do right. They will not do right by Black people." The South certainly won't, but even more so the North had a hard time being convinced that Black people should have rights and citizenship and protection. And so you have to enforce it. No one was going to do it willingly.

END TC: 01:06:48:00