MANISHA SINHA
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Manisha Sinha Interview
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Using the term "Enslaved people" rather than "slaves"

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MANISHA SINHA:

A lot of historians recently have started using the term "enslaved rather than "slaves," because the term slaves seems ascriptive. That you are actually defining someone as a slave, when actually it's a human being who has been enslaved. So there's been a lot of discussion amongst historians and even outside academia, about how we should refer to the enslaved. And historians generally will switch between slaves and enslaved, mainly for writing purposes. You want to vary usage. But I think the term enslaved is probably a more accurate historical description because it actually denotes the act of enslaving another human being. And I think many people have now started using the term enslaver for slaveholders and slave traders and enslaved for slaves.

The American paradox

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MANISHA SINHA:

This famous American paradox was something that historians like Edmund Morgan first talked about. Everyone has always remarked even contemporaries at that time about the contradiction of having a nation founded on the principles of universal equality, but yet a slave holding nation. A slave holding republic, which is really an oxymoron, if you think about it. But what Edmund Morgan did in his pioneering work, A*merican Slavery, American Freedom*, he argued that it was precisely because people of African descent were enslaved, that the founding fathers, at least in Virginia and he was talking only about Virginia, could articulate ideals of universal liberty and equality for whites.

MANISHA SINHA:

Because they were able to solve the problem of inequality by simply enslaving Black labor and declaring all whites then to be equally free and equal politically at least theoretically. And so he said, that this paradox is really not a paradox. That ideals of white liberty and equality in Virginia were actually based on the enslavement of Black people. Now of course, things vary. This may not be true of other colonies, but he was really looking at Virginia where some of the most outstanding founding fathers hailed from, people like Washington, Jefferson and Madison. And he wanted to explain how these people could call themselves good republicans, with a small R, believing in representative government, in ideals of natural equality and at the same time enslave large numbers of people.

Differences in enslaved peoples' experience on small farms and plantations

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MANISHA SINHA:

So we know that conditions of enslavement really varied across the South. If you were enslaved in a small farm with, let's say five enslaved people, versus being in a big plantation and the definition for a plantation in the United States is, if you enslaved more than 20 people, then that was a plantation. Now, one of the interesting features about American slavery is that, while a majority of slaveholders were small farmers, they were not planters – planters were a small elite group - when it comes to looking at enslaved people, roughly half lived in small farms and the other half in plantations with more than 20 enslaved people.

Resistance by the enslaved

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Manisha Sinha:

So, in my own book on abolition, I argue that the first instances of resistance to slavery, which I include in a definition of abolition, really began with the moment of enslavement in West Africa. And then you can look at the shipboard rebellions in the slave trade. So the anti-slavery movement was really coevil with the enslavement of people, because people of African descent always resisted their enslavement. And I think we often forget to look at that as part of the history of abolition. But clearly, in the colonial era and in the 18th century, during the revolutionary era, you had an abolition movement.

MANISHA SINHA:

So this notion that people were just of their times by enslaving people, that there was no one objecting, is actually completely ahistorical. In fact, there

were large numbers of people who were speaking out and writing out against slavery. There were outstanding individual Quaker abolitionists, some dissenting Protestant clergymen, but most importantly, they enslaved themselves. Who were petitioning for their freedom, who were suing for their freedom, and who were voting with their feet, by running away from slavery. If you look at colonial newspapers right down to the Civil War, you will find instances of enslaved people simply fleeing slavery.

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MANISHA SINHA:
So African-Americans resisted their enslavement in various ways. They would resist collectively in rebellions, many times conspiracies that were found out before they became full-fledged rebellions, they would resist individually by simply running away. So when you think of the term slave resistance, we really need to have a very capacious, broad understanding of what slave resistance was because otherwise we miss it. Otherwise we have people saying things like “Oh, enslaved people just never resisted” because they didn't have huge rebellions. And that's simply not true because there was a range of actions that people could take to resist slavery. starting from running away, maybe even working in a manner that was tardy or damaging tools or animals, what was known as day-to-day resistance to slavery or purposely misunderstanding an enslaver's instructions more cunning being used to actually what some people call the weapons of the weak. You use whatever weapons you have to resist your position.

MANISHA SINHA:
So there's a range of resistance, to that I would add all the petitions and suing for your freedom, using the law as an instrument of your freedom. Enslaved people are doing that right from the 18th century. Massachusetts abolishes slavery because two ordinary enslaved people sue for their freedom. And that case goes all the way to the Supreme Judicial Court, which then says in 1783,

that Massachusetts will not have slavery, that it is incompatible with its new state constitution. So Black people resisted slavery. They wrote against slavery. They conspired against slavery. They ran away from slavery. And in fact, if they hadn't done that, you wouldn't have had one of the biggest irritants between the slave South and the free North, which was the fugitive slave issue. Interestingly enough, William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist who never used the term fugitive slaves, he always used the term "self-emancipated slaves," because he said they were not fugitives from law justice, they had simply liberated themselves.

Slave narratives as abolitionist literature

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MANISHA SINHA:

One of the slave narratives that really caught my attention was a narrative written by an enslaved man called William Grimes. And he published a narrative in which he said that his skin could be used as parchment to write the Constitution on. And to me that was such a remarkable statement and captured so well, this incredible paradox of a Republic, a slave holding Republic founded on ideals of universal equality and liberty and at the same time, tolerating an institution that allowed these kinds of inhumane tortures. I think Grimes' evocation of the Constitution and of his own skin, of his own body was really quite remarkable. It caught my attention. I quoted it in my book, but it showed how clearly enslaved people realized those contradictions, realized those incredible hypocrisies of confessing a belief in universal liberty, et cetera and at the same time enslaving nearly 4 million people.

MANISHA SINHA:

The South tried its best to sort of construct a cordon sanitaire against all abolitionists literature. They did this in the 1830s when abolitionists started mailing abolitionist newspapers, pamphlets to the South, they had big bonfires of all abolitionist literature. They actually interfered in federal mail, which is a federal crime to interfere with the delivery of the US mail and burned abolitionist literature. So when it came to the question of slavery, there was absolutely no freedom of speech or press or thought in the South. They became increasingly closed on this question. For instance, this is not a slave narrative, but when David Walker publish his appeal to the colored citizens of the world in 1829, this is the first abolitionists pamphlet really that is published of the second wave of 19th century abolition. Southern governors and mayors ask that this pamphlet be censored and that Walker be arrested. They put a price on his head. Walker unfortunately dies out of natural circumstances a couple of years later, but that's their reaction to abolitionist literature. It is complete censorship and they don't want any of this circulating in the South at all.

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MANISHA SINHA:

I think slave narratives are extremely important in just recovering Black testimony and firsthand experiences of slavery. We know the most famous of them, of course, Frederick Douglass's narrative that made slave narratives as a genre, really popular and important. But long before Douglass and long after Douglass, many African-Americans men and women wrote about their experiences in slavery and abolitionists seized on those narratives as being an accurate portrayal of the horrors of slavery. And they printed them, they published them, they edited them. Many times narratives were actually narrated to white abolitionists who then published it like Sojourner Truth's narrative or Harriet Tubman's narrative they were all narrated to two white antislavery women. And I think it's important not to just see them as

productions of white abolitionists. It's the way that it was dismissed by many historians, but to see it also the ways in which Black people, men and women, ordinary enslaved people talked about their experiences in slavery.

MANISHA SINHA:

And I argue that we should see them as the movement literature of abolition. This is what comprised the literature of abolition. And it is important to give them that do in terms of their indictment of slavery. Because what most people were hearing were slave holders, defending slavery as a benevolent institution in which they were extremely paternalistic and quote "took care of enslaved people." What you get is the polar opposite picture of course, from African-Americans in these slave narratives. So extremely important I think to remember that the slave narratives constituted the best answer to the pro-slavery argument, to the defense of slavery, that slave holding politicians were mounting vigorously at that time. And that is why they didn't like these slave narratives. They didn't want them to be popularized.

MANISHA SINHA:

Everyone's heard of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but she relied on slave narratives to write that novel. And when Southerners challenged her portrayal in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she published another book called *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where she listed literally footnoted all the slave narratives that she had read that helped her write her novel. Now, there were problems with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its portrayal of Black people. She, herself was a colonizationinst like her father, but the fact remains that it is really slave narratives that inspired her to write this international bestseller, her anti-slavery novel. And she knew that. And she actually acknowledged that later on.

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MANISHA SINHA:

So Moses Roper's slave whipping machine is something that the historian Ed Baptist has used so well to describe torture under slavery, Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in The Life of a Slave Girl* is interesting because she chose the white abolitionist she wanted to cooperate with; she rejected Harriet Beecher Stowe, she found her too paternalistic and decided to collaborate with Lydia Maria Child, another white abolitionist author – very famous actually in the 19th century, to write the *Incidents in The Life of a Slave Girl*, but there are many others. There's hundreds literally hundreds of slave narratives that were published at that time. And two of them really stuck with me. One is a narrative by Charles Ball, where he describes the way in which he is sold and resold and the harsh regimen of the cotton regime in the lower South. It's one of those narratives that is not really well known, but I think is really quite remarkable.

MANISHA SINHA:

Charles Ball wrote about not only how he was being sold, he wrote about the way the cotton system worked in cotton plantations. The ways in which cotton that was picked by enslaved people was weighed and if it didn't meet a certain measurement, they would be whipped. Very much similar to what Solomon Northrup describes in *12 Years a Slave*. So I think Charles Ball's narrative, which was an early narrative published, I think at 1837 and then was republished again, after narratives became famous with the publication of Douglass' narrative was quite– one of the first to really talk about the driving regime of the cotton kingdom.

MANISHA SINHA:

The second narrative that I was talking about– this narrative by John Brown is really interesting because he talks about medical experimentation on his skin performed by a doctor, a so-called doctor. And it really will curdle your blood when you read the descriptions of what they did to him. How they would try to peel off his skin, how they would submerge him in a pit and

literally burn his skin to try to find a cure for sunburns. And so that was a narrative that grabbed my attention. And I recently wrote an essay on scientific racism and I looked at this particular slave narrative because it reminds you a little bit of the experiments the Nazi doctors like Mengele, et cetera, did in concentration camps. And it really tears down this notion that somehow slavery was this kind of paternalistic benevolent institution.

Slave resistence is central to the abolitionist movement

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MANISHA SINHA:

So I would argue that... At least that's the argument I make in my book, *The Slave's Cause*, where I say that we have to look of course at Black and white abolitionists as previous historians had done. But I argue that slave resistance is central to understanding the abolition movement. And that many times it is instances of slave resistance that propel the abolition movement forward, whether it's emancipation in Massachusetts or whether it's these famous instances of rebellion and resistance against the Fugitive Slave Law, or the emergence of an entire generation of leaders of the abolition movement. The fugitive slave abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, like Harriet Tubman, they were the most famous, but there was a whole generation of them that come to lead and personify the movement.

MANISHA SINHA:

And so I would argue that slave resistance is not something that is completely separate from the history of abolition. That in fact it is central to it, and that holds true many British historians have argued even for British abolition. They look at famous slave rebellions that evoke the name of Wilberforce or looking at the ways in which slave rebellion propelled abolition in the British parliament. Same is true for the French. You can't talk about abolition at all

without talking about the Haitian Revolution, which is of course the only instance of a successful slave rebellion in world history that established the first modern Black republic. Most abolitionists viewed the Haitian Revolution as an abolitionist revolution. And they praised it precisely for that reason. And the Haitians themselves, saw themselves as part of a broader movement. So for instance, in Haiti, when they gain their independence and they had to name some of the first mans of war, their ships, they call them Wilberforce and Clarkson after the British abolitionists. So they saw themselves as part of a broader abolition movement too. So that's the argument I make in my book, that we cannot understand the abolition movement without centering the history of slave resistance in it.

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MANISHA SINHA:

I think one of the ways in which the abolition movement was portrayed as mainly a movement of Northern whites or of the British, who were very far from slavery, was in fact the response of slaveholders. Slaveholders did not want to talk about Black abolitionists, sometimes would mention, I found in my own research, the Black Douglass versus the white Douglas, that is the Stephen Douglas who ran against Lincoln. But they tended to ignore African-Americans because it did not really suit their purposes to recognize Black resistance. They portrayed the abolition movement as predominantly a movement of Northern whites who had no idea about slavery, who were hypocrites, shedding crocodile tears about slavery, blind to the injustices of their own society. They said that about the British abolitionists, they said that about Northern white abolitionists. If you recognize Afro-British abolitionists, like Olaudah Equiano or Black abolitionists like Douglass, then you would be in fact engaged in a political contest with enslaved people. And that is not something they wanted to do. That would prove their entire theory

of slavery or racial slavery wrong. Because clearly these were people who were fighting for their freedom and could well argue their case.

MANISHA SINHA:

And that unfortunately, that view of abolitionists continued, especially in the American Historical profession, in the mainstream American academia, because African-Americans, who were writing history outside it and writing different views of abolitionists. In fact, some of the first complementary biographies of abolitionists were written by African-Americans like Archibald Grimke, like W.E.D. Du Bois. They were the ones who rescued people like John Brown, who was portrayed as a madman by most American historians. This is the time when most American historians portrayed slavery as this benevolent paternalistic institution. And they portrayed abolitionists as these crazy white, Northern fanatics who had caused a needless Civil War. And that was the dominant interpretation of slavery and abolition. It is not until the Civil Rights Movement, when civil rights activists start calling themselves the new abolitionists, that we start getting more sympathetic portraits of abolitionists. But as I said, African-American writers and historians had always presented an alternative picture of both slavery and abolition.

Abolitionist and anti-slavery movements

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MANISHA SINHA:

So many times abolitionists are not understood clearly, because we confuse them with other people who may have been anti-slavery, but who were not abolitionists activists. So I define abolitionists as people who were actually part of abolitionist societies, who actually acted on their beliefs and did not just mouth some anti-slavery sentiments. So it's very important to understand both Black and white abolitionists as people who were really

activists, who represented a radical interracial social movement, they were ordinary men and women, Black and white. There's also a myth that somehow abolitionists were very middle-class and bourgeois and were against slavery, but had very conservative views on many other issues, including that of the plight of free wage labor. And I found the opposite to be true. I did a study of many of these abolitionists petitions. Other historians have also done this. And we found that on the whole, most of these abolitionists were men and women of humble origins.

MANISHA SINHA:

They were not big property holders. In fact, the elite in the North tended to be rather pro-slavery because it was in the economic interests to be pro-slavery. They had business connections, economic connections, political connections with Southern slaveholders, and they really didn't want to rock the boat. So abolitionists tended to be outsiders in terms of political power. They were fervent minority, but their influence grew in the North throughout the Antebellum decade.

The goals of the abolitionist movement

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MANISHA SINHA:

The other way that you can understand abolitionists was that they were not just against slavery, but that they fought for Black equality. I think it's really important to stress that. People don't realize that abolitionists were also fighting against segregation in the North, against laws that discriminated against free Blacks. They fought to get Black men the right to vote in the North. So it is important to remember these dual goals of abolition.

MANISHA SINHA:

We cannot understand the result of the civil war and reconstruction, unless we understand that this was always a part of the abolitionists program. And end an immediate end to slavery, no compensation to slave holders. If anyone deserved compensation, it would be the enslaved for centuries of unpaid labor and also Black equality, Black political equality, Black citizenship in this country. They really did imagine an interracial democracy that we are still struggling to achieve. The other important point about abolitionists is that many times we see them as this radical minority that had no effect on politics. And I would argue that without the abolition movement, the Republican party itself would not have created a free soil majority in the North that elected Lincoln to the presidency. So they had a tremendous political impact, even though they were outside the mainstream of politics, they were more agitators on the ground, agitators rather than politicians.

Black women leaders in the abolitionist movement

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MANISHA SINHA:

So, African-American women, as I argue in my book, were pioneers when it came to abolitionist feminism. They're often forgotten in the history of abolition, but somebody like Maria Stewart, who is one of the first American women to ever speak in public. Even before her, you look at Phyllis Wheatley. She's not just one of the first Black women to be ever published, she's one of the first American women to be ever published.

MANISHA SINHA:

So they were pioneers, and Garrison says that in *The Liberator.* He points to the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society which is an all-Black society, and later on starts allowing white women to enter it. He says to white women, "Take a lesson from your Black sisters and become active in the abolitionist

movement." Or somebody like the Forten sisters on whom John Whittier, the famous abolitionist poet, wrote a poem on the Forten sisters because of their activism. They also belong to a pioneering Black abolitionist family. The patriarch of that family, James Forten ,of course, had bankrolled Garrison's *Liberator* when Garrison first started publishing it.

MANISHA SINHA:

So they came from long genealogies of abolitionist activism and pioneering Black abolitionist families. And African-American women were there at the forefront in the 1830s. They are there later on with Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, who are famous iconic figures, but there are others who are not that well known, who are, it's really important for us to remember them. And I can't mention them all in this short interview, but I do talk about as many of them as possible in my book where I argue that when we think of abolition, we can't just think of singular, outstanding figures. We have to think of it as this movement, as this radical movement that involved many, many Black women who are relatively unknown today.

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MANISHA SINHA:

When we think of the heroes of American democracy, we often forget that those that really reached for its greatest potential, that pushed the boundaries of democracy and demanding human rights for all people, Black and white men and women, were abolitionists. They were people who were demanding, not just an end to slavery, but equal rights. And certainly most of the Garrisonian abolitionists were demanding women's rights.

MANISHA SINHA:

And when you think of iconic Black abolitionists feminists like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, they were articulating and acting upon what we call

intersectionalism today without using those terms. So I would argue that when you look at the origin points, for instance, of the suffrage movement, you need to look at abolitionist feminists, Black and white, that many times, we forget their activism as a precursor. Those famous women's rights conventions that took place long before the suffrage movement got started after the Civil War.

MANISHA SINHA:

So they were really imagining democracy in the broadest way and ways in which we are still trying to live up to. And that's why I found them so fascinating to study, because they were visioning a democratic project at a time when over 90% of Black people were enslaved in the South, and where all women had no legal or political standing at all, no rights to their wages, no rights to their children, no right, in some states, even to divorce their husbands who may be abusive. They had absolutely no legal and political standing at all, leave alone the right to vote or citizenship.

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MANISHA SINHA:

So those struggles are really long and they have been forgotten when we talk about American history. When we think about the march of democracy, we tend to think of it in very linear ways, with very few actors, and actually the story is far more richer. It's far more complex and far more contested. And it's a more interesting story that I think we should pay attention to.

Frances Watkins Harper

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MANISHA SINHA:

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was a remarkable abolitionist feminist. She was a pioneering Black abolitionist feminist. She came from a very distinguished Black abolitionist family. Her uncle William Watkins was a collaborator of Garrison. He was an agent for *The Liberator*. She was educated by him.

MANISHA SINHA:

When she moved up north, she became famous for her speeches. She was known as the Bronze Muse of the abolition movement. I came across her because there were so many descriptions of her in *The Liberator*, in Garrison's newspaper. She was actually the lecturing agent of the main anti-slavery society as a Black woman lecturing in this predominantly white, rural, northern state, where there were hardly any Black people, w here she writes to another Black abolitionist, William Still, that, "I actually had breakfast this morning with the governor of Maine." So she was actually quite famous. I think she was forgotten by historians who never studied African-Americans and women in the abolition movement the way we do now and the way we have done in the past few decades.But Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was mainly discovered by scholars of literature for her novels and her poetry. But I was more impressed by many of her speeches, by many of her political essays that she wrote against slavery and against colonization.

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MANISHA SINHA:

She was an archetype, typical abolitionist feminist. So for instance, during the war, when Lincoln proposes colonization to some free Black leaders, she writes an amazing essay criticizing Lincoln for doing that, saying, "How can you dispense with the labor even of 4 million Black people? And the urgent cry of the day is emancipation. It's not colonization. That's the wrong way to

go." So her political essays show that she was really an astute activist also. And I encouraged one of my graduate students to do some research work on her and to write a dissertation on her, which she is doing right now, because I still think the full story of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper has not been told.

MANISHA SINHA:

Immediately after the war, she attends the National Women's Rights Convention, where she makes her famous speech to white feminists, where she says, "You white women talk of rights. I, as a Black woman, talk of wrongs." It's an iconic speech of intersectional Black feminism. So she has these many afterlives too, not just as an abolitionist, but also as a suffragist, and then later on, as one of the star speakers of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. She was also an advocate of temperance. So her activism was wide-ranging and she lived for a long time, she wrote a lot, and I think we are just getting to know her broad-ranging activism today.

The 1851 Fugitive Slave Rebellion of Christiana

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MANISHA SINHA:

So many of these incidents of resistance against The Fugitive Slave Law are called slave riots or riots, right? Which really implies a breakdown of law, but I call them fugitive slave rebellions because that's exactly what they were. So if you look at something like the “Christiana Slave Riot,” as it is called in history, but really the fugitive slave rebellion of Christiana in 1851, it takes place in a region of Pennsylvania where there has been ongoing resistance to The Fugitive Slave Law. The local free Black community consists of many fugitives and it's very much part of the underground railroad Southern and Southern Eastern Pennsylvania. A lot of fugitives coming in from Maryland, from Delaware, from Kentucky, go through this area and flee North and

sometimes all the way to Canada. And the man who leads this rebellion, William Parker, is actually a fugitive slave himself, has confronted slave catchers and kidnappers before.

MANISHA SINHA:

So this is not just a sudden riot. It's a very organized system of helping fugitive slaves come into Pennsylvania and then shepherding them to freedom further North. It takes place because a number of Maryland slaves escaped from their owner and William Parker's helping them. It is in his farmhouse where the rebellion takes place, where a US Marshall, along with the Maryland slaveholder I think his name was Edward Gorsuch, if I'm not mistaken, come to this area to retrieve their slaves. And these enslaved people, including William Parker and his wife decided to put on a resistance and there's an all out battle that takes place and the slaveholder dies. They manage to escape, William Parker himself escapes because of course he is liable to be arrested. He escapes actually through Frederick Douglass's home in Rochester where he gifts the gun that he had used to Douglass and makes his way all the way to Canada, where he's eventually interviewed about his role in the so-called Christiana Riot.

MANISHA SINHA:

What's interesting about this incident is that it was not unique, that there would be many such incidents of armed resistance to being recaptured or kidnapped back into slavery throughout the 1850s. And I talk about them in great length.

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MANISHA SINHA:

I argue that you could actually call this “fugitive slave abolitionism.” You have fugitive slave abolitionists like Parker, like Douglass, who write their

narratives, put up armed resistance against being repatriated back to the South. In fact, the reason the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 is passed is because they're so successful in resisting the original Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. So, it is important to look at these incidents and see how widespread it became in the North, in the 1850s, where, in fact, ,any white Northerners felt very uncomfortable also in assisting Southerners to get their slaves back to the South.

MANISHA SINHA:

They felt that these enslaved people were now part of free soil. They were in the North, which were free state that had abolished slavery. So you had this conflict between the laws of the free North versus the laws of the slave states. And many white Northerners felt they did not want to be slave patrollers. Now it is true that some fugitive slaves were in fact sent back South, that they were repatriated and some people did assist slaveholders in getting their slaves back. Some were actually straight out kidnappings of free Black people from the North back into slavery, because the law was so strict, so draconian that could happen too.

MANISHA SINHA:

So the Christiana Slave Rebellion was not a unique one. It happened throughout the 1850s, there were many other cases that took place in Ohio and Boston and Wisconsin, in fact, the last Fugitive Slave Rebellion took place in Troy, New York and Harriet Tubman was part of that. It was the rendition of Scott Nelson, a fugitive slave. They were trying to recapture him and the entire abolitionist and Black community of Troy got together and made sure that that did not happen by simply raiding the courthouse, and Tubman was part of that raid and they freed him and he escaped through the Underground Railroad too.

The aftermath of the Christiana Resistance

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MANISHA SINHA:

So there were a few of these fugitive slave rebellions that became important political cases and Christiana was one of them, because of the trial that took place subsequently. Of course, William Parker escaped, but some of the Black people who took part, including the Quaker neighbors who were part of this group that assisted fugitive slaves, or sometimes employed them in that area in Pennsylvania. I think his name was, Casner- I'm forgetting the full name, but I think his first name was last name was Casner. He was one of the Quakers who was arrested. And what was interesting is that these people were tried for sedition, because they were resisting the Fugitive Slave Law, was defined as treason, as being seditious. And of course that was completely an overstatement of the case. And the case became a costly because many abolitionists went and sat Lucretia Mott, the famous abolitionist, would sit there every day and they would watch the trials. One of the lawyers was Thaddeus Stevens, who went on to become a famous radical Republican Congressman, really sympathized with the abolitionists and they won their case.

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MANISHA SINHA:

Stevens won the case and he and his fellow lawyers fought it on that narrow ground of sedition that, how could you describe this as sedition? And also on the narrow ground that these men were not at all involved in resisting the law itself. So they managed to convince a jury, an all white jury that this case did not hold any merit.

MANISHA SINHA:

And so that's why Christiana is famous because the case also subsequently. There were some other cases that were very famous. One was John Price's rendition, or attempted rendition from Ohio. That was also a big case that was fought in Ohio. And it is known particularly because of a speech that a Black abolitionist, Charles Langston, who was indicted also made in the court. So these cases became opportunities also for Black and white abolitionists to air their grievances against the Fugitive Slave Law. And to argue that they were actually fighting for ideals that most Americans claim to hold dear, which was freedom.

Lincoln's evolution as a politician

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MANISHA SINHA:

So, Lincoln was an extremely thoughtful, but also a very ambitious politician. You can get that sense right from the time that he is serving in the Illinois State Legislature to the time when he gets elected to the House of Representatives in the 1840s. By the 1850s, he thinks his career is done for. He thinks he should just get back to the practice of law. And when he does dip his feet again into politics, the famous run for the Senate in 1858, when he loses to Stephen Douglas, that's where we get the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates, he actually loses that contest. So even though one can see his ambition to be a politician, to be an elected representative, he is not particularly lucky in gaining office, until he is elected to the presidency. And that's why he was seen as a bit of a dark horse candidate for the Republican Party in 1860.

MANISHA SINHA:

I think it's really important not to have one-dimensional portraits of even some of the more famous and great men in American history. Most historians tend not to write hagiographies. They tend not to write mythic portraits of people like the founders, for instance. Or somebody like Lincoln, who is seen as such an important and pivotal figure for the Civil War era. And I think historians have always been a little more balanced in their view of Lincoln, even though in the popular world, he is seen as this mythic, heroic figure. And I think it is equally important then, not to look at certain things he may have said, which of course he did say, and take them out of the historical context and say, "Oh, he was just as bad as slaveholders." Or, "He was just as racist as white Southerners at that time." Because that also is not entirely accurate.In my own view of Lincoln, I have come across the common historical interpretation, which is to see Lincoln evolve through his time in politics. Going from believing that slavery is wrong, but not doing much about it.

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MANISHA SINHA:

Believing that Black people deserve natural rights, meaning they should not be enslaved, but going along with the notion that they do not get citizenship rights. To find near the end of his career, coming out for emancipation very forcefully, and also of course, for Black male citizenship for Union Army soldiers and what he called, the very educated, by which he meant literate. Literacy, as a qualification. Now that becomes the first public pronouncement of an American president for Black citizenship. And that is important to note.

MANISHA SINHA:

So historians like to portray this as Lincoln's evolving positions on slavery. How he sort of grew into office and how he eventually changes his mind about colonization, which was a very popular program in antebellum America, to simply repatriate Black people back to Africa. And for a long time

Lincoln flattered with that idea. Certainly in the 1850s, he seems to have thought that it was the only solution to the so-called slavery problem, the so-called race problem.

MANISHA SINHA:

Interestingly enough, Lincoln is the presidential candidate in 1860 because he's seen as a compromised candidate. Somebody who's not as radical as some of the other figures in the Republican Party, like William Henry Seward, who was seen as more radical as Lincoln, which is rather ironic because during the Civil War, he becomes more conservative than Lincoln on the question of slavery.

MANISHA SINHA:

But he was perceived as being the radical candidate. Lincoln is the compromise candidate. He seems to represent the moderate mainstream of the Republican Party. And he is known only for his remarkable speeches, really. He had that one short term as a representative from Illinois in the 1840s, but people really knew him from all his speeches – the Lincoln-Douglas debates – that really made him famous, even though he was a losing candidate.

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MANISHA SINHA:

But also some of his other speeches that he gave in the east very deliberately in order to acquire a national political reputation. You see Frederick Douglas for instance, noticing the rise of Abraham Lincoln. You see other abolitionists, other anti-slavery politicians taking note of Lincoln in the late 1850s because of his speeches. His speech, for instance, against the Dred Scott decision of 1857 is remarkable because of the ways in which he describes the plight of Black people. He says they are locked behind many doors and the key to each

door is sprinkled all over the nation, amongst different people. And everyone sits and decides how are we going to liberate that person behind all these different doors? It's a remarkable analogy.

MANISHA SINHA:

So those were the kinds of things that Lincoln who was pretty much self-taught his speeches that was the only thing he was really known for. He emerges as everyone's second choice, as the compromise candidate and that therefore the dark horse candidate and eventually wins the nomination in Chicago.

Lincoln and abolitionism

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MANISHA SINHA:

I see it a bit differently. I studied Lincoln quite a bit in looking at his relationship with the abolition movement. And it was clear to me that Lincoln was not an abolitionist. Because abolitionist right from the start are fighting not just against slavery, but for equal political rights for Black citizenship. So it was quite clear to me that Lincoln was not an abolitionist even though he was sincerely anti-slavery. At the same time I thought that what's more interesting about Lincoln is his competing political loyalties. So throughout his antebellum career, as a lawyer, as a politician, he has these competing loyalties to anti-slavery principles, but also to the Union with slaveholders and a Constitution that gives a certain ironclad protections to slavery, including the Fugitive Slave Clause.

MANISHA SINHA:

So for instance, when the Fugitive Slave Law is passed in 1850, Lincoln's position is not the same as that of abolitionists who say, "Let us completely

ignore this law. It's a bad law. We will not abide by it. "And Lincoln recognizes that this law has constitutional sanction. And he says, "Well, yes, it's in the constitution and we have to..." As he always said, "Crucify our conscience and abide by it." Even though he then said, "There should be certain protections for free Black people who could be kidnapped back into slavery under the guise of this new draconian Fugitive Slave Law." So Lincoln is different than the abolitionists, but he's always juggling these conflicting political loyalties that he has to the Union and to Constitution.

MANISHA SINHA:

For abolitionists like Garrison, if the Constitution protected slavery, he was willing to tear it apart. If anything came in the way of his abolitionist convictions, he was willing to defy it. Certainly Black abolitionists and Black people were willing to fight for their freedom no matter what the law in form said. And I think what happens during the Civil War is that Lincoln's conflicting loyalties are finally aligned. Because slaveholders commit rebellion against the Union. So there is no conflict then between his anti-slavery sympathies and his devotion to the Union. Often Lincoln's views are seen as, "Oh, he was just fighting to save the Union." I would argue that he was indeed planning to do that, but that it was at the moment of war when his loyalty to the constitution, to the Union and to anti-slavery principle came together. And certainly he is influenced by forces outside. By enslaved people, again, voting with their feet by defecting to Union Army lines in large numbers, by abolitionists and Radical Republicans who are pressuring him to move against slavery, right from the start of the war. All that is certainly true. But the fact remains that he was willing to be moved on these issues. And the reason why he's willing to be moved is because of a genuine anti-slavery feeling that he articulates as early as the 1830s.

Anti-slavery politics and the Republican Party

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MANISHA SINHA:

So the emergence of anti-slavery politics is often studied as something apart from abolition. And I would argue that in fact, the emergence of anti-slavery politics owes a lot to the abolitionists who first break the national political silence and Northern complicity on the issue of slavery. So the early abolitionists petitions that are gagged, for instance, in Congress gets them a lot of sympathies amongst Northern whites who are more concerned about civil liberties and attacks on the American democratic system than the plight of Black people. So very early, the fate of the slave as the great scholar and activist W.E.B Du Bois put it, was interlinked with the fate of American democracy.

MANISHA SINHA:

And you can see this coming to a head in the 1840s when you have the annexation of Texas as a slave state and the Mexican War, which nearly doubles the size of the Union. And what would be the fate of these new territories? Would they come in as slave states or free states? Became a matter that really concerned a lot of Northerners including Lincoln.

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MANISHA SINHA:

And so it's really during the Mexican War that you have the rise of a distinct political anti-slavery, and that is called Free Soilism. Meaning these people were not abolitionists, the way abolition societies were or their political

party that came before the Free Soil parties the Liberty party stood for, it was for the abolition of slavery and for Black rights. Instead what they're arguing for is the non-extension of slavery. No new slave states. They also adopt a very important part of political abolitionism, and that is, that the federal government should act against slavery wherever it can, right? It should act against slavery in the District of Columbia in abolishing the domestic slave trade. The interstate slave trade, because it could legitimately do that. And in fact, abolitionists had been petitioning Congress to do that since the 1830s. Those are the petitions that were gagged in the 1830s and 1840s.

MANISHA SINHA:

So what the Free Soilers do, is they adopt that program of non-extension. And they say, "We are not abolitionists. We're not going against the constitution, because we know we can't interfere with slavery in a state." Because most states like the Northern states that had abolished slavery, had done it at the state level. There was no federal law that had abolished slavery. And so everyone thought it was up to the states to decide whether they have slavery or not. And this Free Soil position is adopted by the Free Soil Party, it collapses as a viable third party. In 1848, they make a fairly decent run for the presidency. But within two years with the compromise of 1850, the Free Soil Party has collapsed. What you have in the 1850s then, after the compromise, is a severely weakened party system. It's the Second Party System, most Americans don't know about this.

MANISHA SINHA:

The Second Party System consisted of the Democrats versus the Whigs, which is what Lincoln was. He was a Whig who had opposed the Mexican War as a land grab for slavery, he specifically says that. And he had also proposed plans to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, with the ascent of its residents, Its white residents – which would have been very difficult to get because many of them were slaveholders, but still he had proposed that plan.

So, he was very much part of that emerging anti-slavery consensus against slavery in the North.

MANISHA SINHA:

And in the 1850s, you have another political event, like the Mexican War, that causes this anti-slavery feeling to rise up once again. And that is the rescinding of the Missouri Compromise line in order to admit Kansas as a state into the Union. Basically the Missouri Compromise line had been put into place when Missouri was admitted into the Union in 1820. And it was just the latitude. That line was just a latitude. It was the southern border of Missouri, which basically said, you would have slavery below that line and free oil, freedom, above that line. So continuing that half slave, half free as the nation expanded into the West, as it displaces indigenous nations, Native Americans, as they acquire new lands from Mexico.

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MANISHA SINHA:

That was the compromise. With the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Southerners insist that they would support the admission of Kansas only if this line is rescinded. Which meant that slavery could expand North of that line. And this is when you have the rise of the Republican Party. Because the Whig Party has disintegrated. There's really one major party around, that is the Democratic Party, which is increasingly leaning towards the South that is dominated by slaveholders. And you have a succession of Democratic administrations who are willing to even destroy democratic norms in order to make sure that slavery does expand into the West.

MANISHA SINHA:

So the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which is put forward by Stephen A. Douglas, Northern Democrat, whom Lincoln would of course run against for the

Senate elections in 1858 in Illinois, rescinds the Missouri Compromise line. Allows for the expansion of slavery North of that line. And it gives rise to a massive reaction in the North. And what you have in Congress in 1854, when this act is passed, is you have a group of senators and representatives in Congress, many of them actually are abolitionists in sympathy, like Charles Sumner of Massachusetts or Garrett Smith, who indeed was an abolitionist from Upstate New York who put out an appeal of the independent Democrats, which becomes a rallying cry for the rise of a new anti-slavery party on the basis of free soil. No new slave states, no expansion of slavery into the West. And this is the party that Lincoln allies with in the 1850s, and many Northerners do.

MANISHA SINHA:

And it's really remarkable. It hasn't happened since in American history, where you have a new party that is formed in 1854, puts up a candidate in 1856 and virtually wins the entire North. Not all of it, but nearly the entire North and by 1860 they win the presidency with Lincoln. So it is a very remarkable and sudden rise of a new party that takes over. And that's the party system we have today, the Third Party System. Republicans versus Democrats, except of course for our times, we need to completely switch their ideological roles from the 19th century. In the 19th century, the Democratic Party was the party of slavery, of states' rights. The Republican Party was seen as the more progressive party of anti-slavery. And that is the party of course, that Lincoln comes to represent and he becomes the winning candidate in 1860.

Circumstances influencing Lincoln's anti-slavery position

01:03:16:00

MANISHA SINHA:

I would argue that Lincoln was always anti-slavery and he took certain anti-slavery positions right early on in his career when it was not politically wise to take those positions. For instance he condemns the killing of Elijah Lovejoy, the abolitionist editor by a pro-slavery mob. He condemns the lynching of Black people in Mississippi in 1835 in a slave conspiracy scare. But at the same time, he doesn't really do anything against slavery. He is not known for defending, for instance, fugitive slaves, than many anti-slavery lawyers did. He takes cases from slaveholders too. So in his actions, it's not particularly clear that he is taking an activist part. I would say the circumstances changing really made a difference. He's always uncomfortable about slavery, but comfortable enough in his loyalty to the Union and constitution, that he was not going to rock the boat on this question.

MANISHA SINHA:

I think it's really the changing circumstances what many Northerners like Lincoln saw as the “Slave Power” attacking, not just the freedom of Black people, but also Democratic norms attacking the Union, attacking the rule of law in this country. That's when many Northerners like Lincoln really started taking more strongly anti-slavery positions. And he felt that he could join the Republican party because it was a constitutionally good thing to do. You're not calling for the abolition of slavery, you're calling for its non-extension, which was fine because actually the federal government did have power over the territories. And therefore you could prevent the spread of slavery into the territories. So it is the changing circumstances I think that allow him to become more activist to take action against slavery.

MANISHA SINHA:

So I'm sorry, I'm not being particularly concise, but I'll give you an example. When Lincoln is elected precedent, he is asked to compromise in order to make sure that the Southern States that have succeeded simply because he's been elected on an anti-slavery platform will rejoin the Union. And so he's

willing to go along with an amendment that would have made slavery a permanent part of the Southern States, right? You couldn't touch it. The federal government couldn't touch it. But when they said let's have an amendment that would extend the Missouri compromise line or that would allow slavery to expand in the territories that was his red line. And he said, no, I will not compromise on this. That's the platform I was elected on the non-extension of slavery. And this is something I will not compromise on. So that's the first time where Lincoln chooses antislavery before the Union, because in his mind, the Union at that point really could not survive as half slave and half free as he had said earlier.

01:06:42:00

MANISHA SINHA:

Lincoln was generally rather modest. He was not the kind of person who went around saying I'm the greatest president ever, et cetera. He was extremely modest and humble in the way he portrayed himself. And he would win over people who were more erudite and educated than him by his modesty. And he says this at one point, he says, "I'm the first to admit that I have not ruled circumstances, but that circumstances have ruled me." And that to a certain degree is true. When the circumstances changed for instance, in the middle of the Civil War, Lincoln comes to abolitionist ground: he's ready to move on emancipation, he is ready to enlist Black men into the Union Army, he is ready to endorse Black citizenship. That's a big shift from his antebellum position which is, Black people should have natural rights, but as far as political and civil rights are concerned, let each state decide what rights they should have. And indeed his own state, Illinois did not give Black men the right to vote before the war.

MANISHA SINHA:

I think it's really important to understand that when we portray Lincoln as quote, the “Great Emancipator,” that, that image is somewhat ahistorical and mythic and it's an image that Lincoln himself was uncomfortable with. When people congratulated him on the emancipation proclamation, he would always say that don't congratulate me, think about all those abolitionists. And he named them, he named British abolitionists, he says, every school boy will remember people like Wilberforce or people like Garrison, but they don't remember the people who defended slavery. So he is aware of the historical nature of his own actions. But he's always saying that I'm not the first person to argue against slavery, that we should indeed look at some of these earlier abolitionists that came before him. He doesn't mention the famous Black abolitionists that influence people like Wilberforce and Garrison. And I spent a lot of time, I would say 10 years of my life excavating them. So there's a long lineage to the rise of anti-slavery feeling in the United States. And if you dig far enough, it'll go right back to enslaved people themselves.

Frederick Douglass

01:09:31:00

MANISHA SINHA:

So that's another way that the abolition movement was so important in early America, because it was the one space where disenfranchised people, African-Americans, women, could make their voices and opinions heard. And the most important group of course, were fugitive slaves like Frederick Douglass. Douglass'sabolition comes from his experience in slavery. He didn't need a lecture on abolition to be told that slavery is an unfair, brutal and oppressive institution. If you read the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, the first iteration published in 1845, you can see Douglass talk about his own awakening against slavery based on his own experiences

under slavery. And when he escaped slavery around 1837, I think he'd escaped slavery and he comes to New York. He's greeted by Black abolitionists. The people who assist him are important Black abolitionists like David Ruggles, who runs the New York Vigilance Committee that assist fugitive slaves.

MANISHA SINHA:

The person who marries him and Anna Murray Douglass in New York is a Black abolitionist who was a fugitive slave himself, Reverend James W.C. Pennington. He makes his way to New Bedford, which one historian has called "the fugitive's Gibraltar" because there were so many fugitive slaves there, so many Black and white abolitionists there. And it is there that he starts reading William Lloyd Garrison's, *The Liberator*. And he describes the experience. He was saying things that, that really spoke to Douglass. Because Douglass had experienced slavery first hand. So Douglass discovers Garrison, and then Garrison discovers Douglass, at a meeting in Nantucket, at an abolitionists meeting in Nantucket in Massachusetts, where Douglass rises up and talks about his experience. And immediately Garrison sees the value of having an authentic voice within the abolition movement, like Douglass' – somebody who could describe his experiences under slavery first hand. And he immediately enlists Douglass to become a lecturing agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society.

MANISHA SINHA:

Now, Douglass is not the first Black agent, you had others before him. Most famously Charles Remond, the Remond Black abolitionists family in Massachusetts is quite famous. There were many African-Americans who had preceded whites in the abolition movement. But Douglass becomes a star immediately, and because he is such an amazing orator and he's able to talk about his experiences that even racist crowds find themselves listening to him. He has an electrifying effect on his audience.

MANISHA SINHA:

So Douglass becomes quite famous. He writes his narrative because white abolitionists think that his speeches are so good that he should write his narrative. Once he writes his narrative, people think that he can be recaptured back into slavery. So he's sent by the Anti-Slavery Society and Garrison to England, on a lecturing tour where he becomes an international celebrity because of his famous speeches. By the time Douglass comes back to the United States in the late 1840s, British abolitionists have bought his freedom. He has emerged as a leader within the abolition movement in his own right. And he starts publishing his newspaper in upstate New York, by the 1850s he breaks with Garrison, because Garrison believes that American politics is completely tainted and one should not participate in it. As an abolitionist you should simply agitate outside politics, Douglass rejects that. And he thinks that it is really important for abolitionists to actually participate in politics and get the federal government to act against slavery.

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MANISHA SINHA:

So Douglass is actually famous long before Lincoln. Frederick Douglass is not only the most photographed man of the 19th century, he's also famous before Lincoln, when Lincoln is a small time politician and a country lawyer.

Douglass and Lincoln

01:14:24:00

MANISHA SINHA:

By the end of the 1850s, when Lincoln emerges as the Republican Party candidate, that's when Douglass takes note of him. And that's when in 1860, he supports Lincoln, even though he really wants a true abolitionist to win

the presidency. He sees Lincoln as just an anti-slavery politician, not a true abolitionist who is against the abolition of slavery. But the partnership between Douglass and Lincoln really comes about during the Civil War and during Reconstruction or the parts of Reconstruction that Lincoln was alive, or he was of course killed soon after the war ended. It's during the war that Douglass like many abolitionists is actually goading Lincoln to act against slavery.

MANISHA SINHA:

He thinks Lincoln is being too slow and too cautious, and he uses his newspaper, *Douglass's Monthly*, and he uses his speeches to criticize Lincoln and say he must act against slavery. And once Lincoln does act against slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation and starts recruiting Black soldiers into the Union Army, that's when Douglass begins meeting him in person. Douglass first meets Lincoln in 1863 to protest the conditions of Black Union Army soldiers who are being paid less than white soldiers. And Douglass had recruited these men and he thinks it's a breach of faith, that the Union is not paying them equally. And he meets Lincoln and he's impressed by Lincoln, because Lincoln does not act in any racially condescending manner to him. In fact, he greets Douglass by saying that, "Mr. Douglass, I have heard of you and I have read. I have heard about you and I have read you." So he clearly knows who Douglass is. And he listens to Douglass respectfully, listens to his concerns about the inequalities in pay, and he would go on to meet Douglass two other times while he was alive.

MANISHA SINHA:

Eventually of course, the pay is equalized. Lincoln is not really the forefront of that movement. It's really the radical Republicans in Congress who carried that abolitionist agenda forward. They make sure that African-Americans have access to officer ranks and that they are paid equally and that they are

paid retroactively for the sort of inequalities that they had suffered in the early days of the war.

MANISHA SINHA:

And the second time that Lincoln meets Douglass is really quite interesting. It's just before the 1864 presidential elections, where Lincoln thinks he's going to lose because there's a real racist backlash against the Emancipation Proclamation. You have the New York City draft riots, where Union army soldiers have to basically suppress this riot against African-Americans in New York City. It's the largest rebellion besides the Slaveholders' Rebellion, which resulted in the war itself.

MANISHA SINHA:

So Lincoln thinks he might lose the election because of the racist backlash to emancipation. He summons Douglass to the White House and he proposes to him what he calls a John Brown plan, which is really ironic, right? Because here's the president of the United States telling Frederick Douglass, "Maybe if I lose the election, then a Democratic president will actually reverse the Emancipation Proclamation, so what we need to do is get as many enslaved people from the Confederacy into freedom, the way John Brown had planned, as we can."

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MANISHA SINHA:

And Douglass is stunned that Lincoln is even proposing this to him. Of course, Douglass thinks that Lincoln is too slow. He even flirts for a very little while with a movement to replace Lincoln with a more radical candidate in the Republican party ticket. Other abolitionists flirt with that movement, but it really comes to nothing. Most others like Garrison, et cetera, are very much firmly behind Lincoln, especially after he has issued the Emancipation

Proclamation. Of course, that doesn't come to pass because Lincoln wins the election.

MANISHA SINHA:

The third time Douglass meets Lincoln is just after he's been reelected, where he hears Lincoln's famous second inaugural address, where Lincoln really uses words which are very unlike him, which were abolitionist words, where he famously says that the war will not be over until every drop of blood drawn by the lash on a slave's back is paid by a drop of blood drawn by the sword during the war, that the sins that guilty nation would not be paid for until that is done. That is a abolitionist reasoning. And Douglass is in the crowd. He's very close to Lincoln. He hears those words and he's incredible moved by them. He goes to attend the reception and he's stopped at the door by the doorman who just sees a Black man approaching and does not want to let him in, does not realize that he is Frederick Douglass. Somebody sends word inside to Charles Sumner, the radical Republican, that Douglass is being stopped and not being allowed in, and Sumner tells Lincoln that this is what's happening. And Lincoln goes out and greets Douglass and insists that he be allowed in. He greets Douglass and he tells Douglass, and this is all Douglass' recollection, "Mr. Douglass, what did you think of my speech? Yours is the opinion I value the most." And Douglass turns around and tells him, "Mr. President, that was a sacred effort." And that's their last meeting and of course in April, Lincoln is assassinated by a Confederate sympathizer, John Wilkes Booth.

MANISHA SINHA:

And then Douglass would go on to remember Lincoln, many times. He would give speeches on Lincoln, where he would talk about how slow Lincoln was, that from the abolitionist's perspective, he seemed slow, but as a statesman who was bound to respect the opinions of his country, he was actually pretty swift and zealous when it came to emancipation.

01:21:20:00

MANISHA SINHA:

And this was not Douglass just glorifying Lincoln, because Douglass did not like the statue that was put up by the Western Sanitary Commission that is still there in Washington, D.C. of Lincoln with an arm extended showing an enslaved man at his feet, rising up from his chains. Douglass did not like that statue because it shows Lincoln as benevolently bestowing freedom on Black people, and Black people as simply the passive recipients of the gift of freedom, when Douglass knew that African-Americans like himself had long fought for and resisted slavery. He didn't like that statue and many African-Americans and abolitionists did not like the statue.

MANISHA SINHA:

And I think it would be one that probably Lincoln would not like, either, because he's known to have said, when he walked into the fallen Capitol of the Confederacy in Richmond, there were people who were literally falling at his feet and he told them, "No, don't kneel before me. You must kneel only before God." He didn't like people kneeling before him. So he probably would not have liked that imagery.

MANISHA SINHA:

So, there are many ways in which we must remember Lincoln, but we must remember that he was part of a broader anti-slavery movement, and this is what Douglass said in one of his eulogies to Lincoln. That Lincoln was great, not because just as a singular man, but because he came to head, it so happened, as the president who issued the Emancipation Proclamation, he came to head this vast movement, this anti-slavery movement. And Douglass is signaling that we must do as much justice and as much praise to that greater movement as we do to Lincoln.

Black soldiers' influence on Lincoln

01:23:23:00

MANISHA SINHA:

Lincoln, like most African-Americans, realized that you couldn't ask people to perform the biggest sacrifices, the duties of citizenship, and yet deny them the basic rights of citizenship. And I think that had a decisive impact on him when it came to endorsing Black citizenship. He articulated it very nicely in a letter that he wrote to James Conkling, who was complaining about – and it's a public letter, so it was not just a private letter – he wrote a public letter that was published in newspapers, where he said to those whites who are complaining about Black men being enlisted in the Union army or being considered as citizens, he says, "When peace comes, there'll be some Black men," and I'm paraphrasing here because I can't actually read the quote. But he says, "When peace comes, there'll be some Black men who will realize that with steady eye and bayonet, they have achieved this great victory for democracy, while there'll be some white ones who will never forget that, with resentful and deceitful hearts, they have striven to hinder it."

MANISHA SINHA:

So that was an amazing quote. One of those quotes of Lincoln that shows how much the impact of a Black military service had on his thinking about giving Black men the right to vote and acknowledging them as citizens of the Republic.

Lincoln's assassination and Reconstruction

01:25:09:00

MANISHA SINHA:

So, Lincoln was not an abolitionist, and even when he dies, I would not use the term that Lincoln was an abolitionist, but I would say that Lincoln lands on abolitionist ground, because he is the president who does fulfill the two main goals of abolition. One is the complete destruction of slavery by supporting the 13th Amendment, by trying to make that his legacy, not just the Emancipation Proclamation. He says it must be put in the constitution; The 13th Amendment that abolishes slavery must be in the constitution. So the complete destruction of slavery. And the second was his public endorsement of Black citizenship. That was the twin goals of abolition.

So he does land on abolitionist ground and it is the reason why historians tend to look at Lincoln's views on slavery and race as constantly evolving towards that abolitionist ground. I would say that Lincoln was very much, at the end of his life, in sympathy with the abolitionist movement and most abolitionists, like Garrison, understood that he had indeed fulfilled the aims of the movement and they supported him wholeheartedly.

01:26:35:00

MANISHA SINHA:

I look at what Lincoln said, in terms of Reconstruction of the Union. And if you compare what Lincoln was moving towards, in terms of both Black male citizenship, education for Black people, the way he allowed the Freedmen's Bureau to confiscate abandoned lands, the way he approved of many of those actions, and compare that to that of his successor, Andrew Johnson, who was a Southern white man from Tennessee. A poor man, but one who had been a slaveholder, but who was completely racist, had no sympathy for any agenda for Black rights. I think that Reconstruction under Lincoln would have been closer to what came to be radical reconstruction because Johnson did not want African-Americans to be part of the body politic, and Lincoln towards, at least on the eve of his death, has endorsed Black citizenship. In fact, it's the

reason why he gets assassinated. Not because of emancipation, but because he endorses Black citizenship, because in that speech he makes from the White House balcony where he says, as he did in his letter to Michael Hahn, the governor, the military governor of Louisiana, where he says, "You should consider giving the right to vote to Union army soldiers, Black union army soldiers, to educated Black men. They deserve the right to vote."

MANISHA SINHA:

That's the speech that John Wilkes Booth hears, and he says, "That means," quote, "N citizenship. That's the last speech he will ever make." And a few days later, he in fact assassinated Lincoln for endorsing Black political equality. So it's really his endorsement of Black equality that enrages racists and Confederate sympathizers like John Wilkes Booth. I think Lincoln, if he had lived, it's a counterfactual, would probably have endorsed Black citizenship during Reconstruction.

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