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MARY FRANCES BERRY
LINCOLN'S DILEMMA
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Mary Frances Berry Interview
03-18-2021
Interviewed by Jackie Olive & Barak Goodman
Total Running Time: 01:14:26

START TC: 00:00:00:00

CREW MEMBER 1:

Dr. Mary Francis Berry interview, take one [inaudible 00:00:11].

CREW MEMBER 2:

Got it.

CREW MEMBER 1:

Marker.

1860 Secession & January 6, 2021 Insurrection

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

The January 6 insurrection at the Capitol reminds us of what can happen when you have deep polarization in the country. We can think back to episodes earlier in our history. The major one of course that everybody runs to and is correct, is about the secession movement that led to the Civil War, and how Lincoln and the Republicans dealt with that in efforts to try to keep disunion from happening, but they weren't able to prevent it. So the nation was torn asunder and Lincoln's... The way he handled it though... His point was that, "My first priority is to try to figure out how to keep the Union together." There could have been a lot of other kinds of things that he could have done.

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

There were people who said that we should let the Southern States go their own way, and leave them alone since they are determined to leave. There were people who said, what we should do is send out the army and arrest all the people who were involved in fomenting this secession and insurrection, but he didn't do any of those things. Of course, he waited, he was patient and he tried to do everything that he could to sort of calm the waters, even though none of the efforts to try to keep the peace worked, that was his posture the whole time. What we saw on January 6th and what we have seen since, is people were so angry and discontented about what happened - members of Congress, the American public and so on, the people on the Trump side, 75 million strong, according to the voting count - many of them were upset because they really thought the election had been stolen and that the whole thing was rigged.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

They thought they had a right, some of them thought they had a right to go in the Capitol. I remember some of them were carrying Confederate flag as they marched through. On the other side, people who were offended by all this and angry and frightened said, "Well, what we need to do is go after those people who did it and punish them and do everything we can to them." Well, people who engage in violence should be punished, everybody would agree with that, but there are lots of people who thought the election was rigged and maybe somebody could talk to them.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

I think if Lincoln were around, he would have said, "Let's punish the people who engage in violence but let's see if we can sit and talk to these other folks, or figure out some way to get them to not go off and do whatever else they

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might do." I think that if you compare the two, you will see that the kind of approach that we've had to, it is not the same as Lincoln I think would have had. If he had approached what happened after his election in the same way, the union would have been torn asunder.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

The January six episode, I think about in terms of knowing that in 2000 when we had an election, there were many people who thought that it was rigged when George W. Bush won the election over Albert Gore, Jr. Some members of Congress, including members of the Black caucus, some of whom were still in the Congress right now, walked over to the Capitol to try to disrupt the count and try to get Albert Gore Jr. not to count the votes. They were angry with him and furious, the record shows, when he wouldn't do it. They said he was a coward, why didn't he do it? And that Bush and his brother, Jeb, who was the governor of Florida, and the woman who was secretary of state, who in fact was on his campaign committee, had not let people vote, they had suppressed the vote. There were episodes where some people who were registered had been voting all the time when they came, they wouldn't let them vote.

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

I think about that. The key difference here was that you had violence that took place in the Capitol and you had mayhem, which is going beyond asking about the vote being rigged and can we recount it? You have a right to ask that a vote be recounted if that's what you think should be done, but not to engage in violence. Now, underneath the opinion of some of those people who were there in the Capitol may be their views about white supremacy. We know white supremacy is real, that's not to be controverted. And so that may have been the underlying reasons that they were disaffected because to

perpetuate white supremacy would be in their minds, harder as a result of what was going on.

Lincoln's contradictions

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

I remember when Obama was president and somebody asked him, what was he, what did he stand for? How did people, he said, well, people have their own view. They make up what they see in him. And everybody has their own opinion about what they see in him. And I think in, we have a Lincoln for all seasons. We have a Lincoln for people who want to see him one way or another, and people send me emails all the time with big arguments about this is the way Lincoln was – make sure you talk about that. And this is the way he was. They're often contradictory. So we have him for our own uses and our own purposes. In my view, he was a deeply thoughtful person. He was a person who didn't believe he knew all the answers. He was mainly concerned beyond anything else with not expanding slavery beyond the states where it existed and with keeping the Union together.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Now, as he went along, he did something that effective politicians are able to do. And he was very effective, which is to change his mind or move one way or the other, depending on how the circumstances changed. Instead of just keeping to the same argument in the same position every time. And he knew what his end goal was, keep the Union together. Don't expand slavery if we can help it, but mainly it was keeping the Union together and everything he did in his own view was designed to reach that objective. And even at the end, when the war was over and in the last letter that he wrote before he was assassinated, he talks about the reality of Black people being in the army,

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Black men, being in the army and serving and working – maybe we ought to think about letting some of them vote. In other words, he was trying to figure out what is the reality going to be now to keep this thing together. So I see him as an effective politician who was practical and who was thoughtful and logical. And if you try to make them be consistent, you know, they say that foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds. I don't know that I think those were Emerson's lines, but in fact, he was not trying to be consistent except that he wanted to save the Union.

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

I have no idea whether Lincoln would have liked being called the “great emancipator” and the savior of the Negro peoples as we were called then. But I suspect that he would not have wanted to be called that at the beginning of his presidency and with the actions that he took, he understood clearly that what he was trying to do is save the union and that would have been a misnomer. Although politically, it might've been useful later. It wouldn't have been useful at the time because of the various population groups that were involved in voting and other things, calling him the “great emancipator” and the savior of Black people would not have been very effective with some groups of people who lived in various parts of the country, even in the North.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

We know that there were large numbers of people in the North who were opposed to making the war about ending slavery and that they got very upset when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. We had the riots and the Draft Act, which was passed in 1863 to try to get more white men into the service because they needed them. There were riots in New York City, the Draft Riots, in which lots of Black people were killed, including children in an orphanage. And we know that as a matter of fact, there were people they call

Copperheads in the North. Copperhead is a snake that will bite you in a minute who were opposed to making the war a war to free the slaves. And so I don't think Lincoln in that environment would have been, wanted to be called the "great emancipator".

How Lincoln's policies affected the enslaved

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

When the Union had terrific problems, militarily with trying to keep enough men in the army, because a lot of the white guys who are the ones who were in the army by and large left, and didn't want to be in the military. Some of them skedaddled to Canada like they did during the Vietnam War, some to evade the draft when they had the draft, people didn't want, they didn't have enough. And they had several disasters militarily in the first years of the war, including the first battle that took place. And so they had a manpower source shortage.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

So the question was, what do you do about that? And that is why Lincoln came up with the idea of the the Emancipation Proclamation. That in fact, and there are some people who see the Emancipation Proclamation as he was committed to ending slavery. You cannot read the Emancipation Proclamation or anything about it from that period, without realizing that Lincoln decided that this was one way to get some more men and to the service and that if he could say that the slaves were free and any place where slavery still existed, that he might get some slaves to run away, which they did do.

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And some were already running away from the beginning. Every time they saw the union troops come, they would run toward them. In Tennessee they called the Union troops the blue men, and they would say, "The blue men are coming." And they'd all go running, try to catch up with them, so that they could be freed. In fact, you had a manpower resource that the Union could use the impact on Black people of his policies during the war. You had a lot of refugees. You had a lot of people following there and women and children, and some of the women worked for the soldiers. They wash clothes, they did all kinds of things. Well, not just the Black soldiers, but any of the military that they followed along. They had children with them going along. They were hungry, they had to have rations, all of these things had to happen.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

There was great chaos and disorder as a result and families, even though they were not official families because you couldn't get married, they were Black folks who were slaves couldn't get married. They were people who had familial relationships were torn asunder by what happened during that period. But the overall impact was to put us on the road toward freedom. Now his policies, Lincoln's policies, his commitment to the Union and what he did about the Union, one could argue that Lincoln, if he had not been assassinated, might've been the kind of president who would lead us toward not only full abolition of slavery, but equality and justice under the law and that Black people might've been better off.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

I see no evidence that tells me that that's actually true, but that is a narrative that some people would like to accept. Since we know how bad Andrew Johnson was, it seems logical to say Lincoln would have been really good and

he would have, but having saved the union and moving in a certain direction, what would he have done in terms of leadership so that the humanitarian crisis that faced Black people as a result of not getting land and being without economic resources and having the backlash that took place, maybe none of that would have happened. Maybe.

The connection between enslavement & federal indigineous policies

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MARY FRANCES BERRY:

The policy of the US government at the same time that slavery existed was to remove the indigenous people from land that they held, for example, in the South and Georgia and Alabama and other states and move them away. We know about the Trail of Tears and which so many people were harmed. Once they moved for the other Native Americans or indigenous people out West, the Union was... Harassed them, there were wars. In other words, you could call it genocide. The genocide was not successful because they didn't kill all the Indians.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

They didn't reach the maximum success, but they certainly suffered as a result of all that had happened to them. But if- some people say that Lincoln should be blamed for his role in perpetuating this and not standing against it. It is true that the American presidents who existed all that whole long period from the treaties that were ignored, made and ignored all the way through the military ventures, against them, everything from the Seminole War, Trail of Tears, and you can carry it all into the Plains Indians that in fact, they all were in the business of leading a nation toward expanding and taking over Indian, Native Americans territory and brutalizing them and ignoring their

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sovereignty all at the time that we kept arguing that they had some kind of sovereignty.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

So that Lincoln in that was no different from the other people who were commander in chief and who were presidents of the United States at that time. I don't know whether you can say that he was somewhat more positive about slavery at the same time, getting rid of slavery at the same time that he was being negative about indigenous people, or you can blame him for both. He was mainly interested in the period before he was president of the United States in trying to keep slavery from expanding from the South. He was part of the Free Soil movement, which was the foundation of the Republican Party to keep them from moving the slave plantation from moving out to the West so that white workers and farmers could have land and native Americans, indigenous people were in the way of that. All right. And, but you could say that Black people benefited from it to the extent that they didn't expand it all the way out. If you want to make that argument.

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

I thought about Lincoln's behavior toward indigenous people or the policies toward indigenous people and Native Americans, which include at the same kind of actions that other presidents before him and after him engaged in whether it was arrest, having people arrested and executed for opposing federal policy or trying to hold onto their land, forced marches and that kind of thing. But what he was doing was what the other executives had done, which is to move the native peoples out of the way, which had been happening since the beginning of the republic and treating them unfairly.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

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And he probably saw it as they, other ones, presidents saw it and talked about it as something that was necessary in order to develop the nation and move the nation forward and so on and not interpreting it in the same way you do it. Now, we might wish that Lincoln had deviated from all the other presidents before. That raises a question of do you fault leaders for not being totally ahead of their times and doing things that nobody else who was a leader ever did and therefore blame them for it, or you simply say, here's what they did and let's acknowledge what they did, but what they did was consistent with what everybody else was doing. And that the overriding problem is that the nation itself should never have had a policy of exploitation that led to this kind of abuse of human beings no matter who did it.

Recasting Lincoln's position on slavery

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Lincoln was a free soiler. He was not an abolitionist. And he was not part of the anti slavery movement, which wanted to abolish slavery in the South, which wanted to abolish it everywhere. I mean, the anti slavery movement, you can date it all the way back to when the Quakers and the 18th century came out with their big mandate against man stealing, they call it that it was immoral and wrong. And all of the people who mobilized to try to help free slaves or to have them hide them, or when they came to the North and runaways and all that. People who liked John Quincy Adams after he was president ran and got elected to the house of representatives and kept presenting resolutions to the house of representatives to end slavery, at least in the District of Columbia. And he did that the entire time, but he was in the house of representatives.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Lincoln was no William Lloyd Garrison. He was no William Sumner. He was none of these people. He was not an anti slavery or abolitionists leader. And he certainly was not Frederick Douglass. So that I think that you, he was a free soiler. He believed that Blacks and so far as I can tell were human beings, although he was a great fan of Thomas Jefferson, and it was Thomas Jefferson who wrote notes on the state of Virginia, which came out in 1785, which in fact talks about Blacks being inhuman. There's a whole section there. If you never read it, it makes a terrible bedtime reading about how Blacks are emotional and how Blacks are- don't have the kind of sense that human beings have and all the rest of it. I don't think that Lincoln can by anybody's definition be considered to be an abolitionist or an anti slavery man in the early 19th century.

The exploitative relationship of the North with the South

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MARY FRANCES BERRY:

Slavery became entrenched in this country because slavery was a way to support capitalism, which some people call racist capitalism. And because the slave labor was the input into, into capitalism and slavery began with the slave trade. And the slave trade was very important to the economy in some of the Northern States, Rhode Island, for example, in Massachusetts and the like, and you can tell how important it is because my students are always surprised when I tell them, look at the, what happened in the constitutional convention. Why do you think those people from the North are supporting the South when they say don't end the slave trade right away at the constitutional convention? Why are these Northerners from these Northern States joining them in supporting, and why did George Mason, who was from

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Virginia say, Oh, we should end it right now. And my students are very puzzled and then we discuss it. And they find out that the people who were from the North were supporting the slave trade. And they had been slave traders that have made fortunes off the slave trade, which is why they didn't want to end it right away. And that George Mason knew that Virginia had become a breeder of slaves with masters in plantations, forcing Black people to have children with each other so that they could sell them as slaves down to the other parts, South Carolina, which needed as many slaves as they could get. And so you have the North very heavily invested in this, an economic reality of needing a slave labor. And it just became worse with— Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, and then cotton became the basis, the economy, and you needed even more slave labor, South Carolina needed it for its sugar and the lower South, Louisiana and all the rest of it. So it just expanded.

00:24:12:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

It was the input and people who do economic history and for years have talked about how well the United States developed in the early 19th century, all across the country. We became so prosperous and I've read some books where they do that, and they don't even mention slaves or slave labor. And I'm thinking, wow, how did they happen to forget that? So in fact, slavery was essential to the promotion of capitalism and white supremacy and its perpetuation in the country.

The Black press

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Black newspapers began with *Freedom's Journal* in the 1830s and Black newspapers. Frederick Douglas of course had his own paper, which at one

point was called *Frederick Douglas Paper*. And during the war itself, the Civil War, we had the *Christian Recorder* and the *Anglo African*, and it was important for Black people who could read and then would tell other Black people who couldn't, what in fact was going on from their perspective. They saw, for example, using Black soldiers after the Emancipation Proclamation, as a way to earn their freedom, that we would be earning a freedom and that we would be responsible for all our own freedom, which is one of the big themes that they, at that time, they also talked about something that was not talked about in other circles.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

It talked about politics and whether we would be able to vote someday or be free or whatever, but they also talked about land. And whether in fact, we would ever be able to have our own farms and agriculture and all the rest of it. It was important to have a different perspective and an outlet for people to express, express their views. And that's what the Black newspapers provided.

Importance of Black enlistment

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

That the idea was that if by Black people and Frederick Douglas said this a lot, when, when Lincoln, after the Emancipation Proclamation, when he went out to raise regiments of Black soldiers, including the one in Massachusetts and his son was in the military and other Black people wrote about it and talked about it, that it was important for as many Black people who ran away or free Negroes from the North or whoever they were to be in the military so that they would show up and be people who in fact fought for their freedom. And in fact, headed us toward full abolition by doing that. Because we knew

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that from the *Dred Scott* case in 1857, Justice Taney had said that one of the reasons why we know Blacks are not citizens and never could be is because they don't serve in the military. Because one of the things you do, if you want to be free and if you want to be considered a citizen, you're eligible and you serve in the military, that's one of the big parts of the *Dred Scott* decision, and they knew this. So having people go out and fight for their own freedom, some 200,000 Blacks who served in the military, was important as a way to earn their freedom and to earn their citizenship.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

What did it mean for Black men to be able to fight in the Civil War? What it meant was they were recognized as human beings, as people with claims to citizenship and that they, despite what Justice Taney said and the *Dred Scott* case that Blacks weren't citizens, could never be citizens, ever. That was not true. And they were willing to go and fight for their freedom and for the freedom of their people. And even though they were mistreated, we know the whole history of that. The war is how they were exploited, abused, given weapons that half the time didn't work, massacred on occasion and suffered all kinds of ignominy.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And also that even when they were brave and deserved medals, nobody gave them to them. They were lucky if they just didn't get killed. And then even after they were in the service, many of them had trouble getting pensions after they were out. And the discrimination just seemed to go on and on and on. But at least they had fought for freedom and they had earned citizenship rights. They believe for Black people. And many of them didn't give their weapons and turn them in when the war was over. And the army asked that weapons be turned in and many Black soldiers didn't turn them in. They

wanted to wait to see whether some kind of equal justice was given to people before they did that.

Frederick Douglass

00:29:26:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

There were a number of people who ran away from slavery, who came to the North and who some of them stayed in the states and some went to Canada. And they were able through the auspices of people who helped them along the way become educated. And there were some people who became writers, and people did all sorts of things, worked in the anti- slavery movement and so on. But Frederick Douglass became the most important leader of Black people, and the best known person in the whole country, and what remained the best known people throughout the period of Lincoln's presidency, afterwards, all the way until his death. I mean, he was the guy, Frederick Douglass was. He was extraordinarily intelligent, he was extraordinarily perceptive, and he knew how to use language, and he knew what to say to people, where if you read his speeches and you read the meetings he had with Lincoln and so on, you can see that he was strategic, if I might put it that way, he knew how to attack and at the same time to come away with something.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

That was the relationship that he had with Lincoln. And not to walk away completely when you had a disagreement and just say, "Well, I'll never have anything to do with you ever again" because that way lies futility. And so that was the beauty of Douglas. The thing about Douglass, many people like his speech that he made about the 4th of July in 1840s or early 1850s when he's

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talked about how for Black people, who cared about the 4th of July, it didn't have anything to do with our freedom. And that's the one they loved the best. But the one I love the best is the one he gave about on the anniversary of West India, Indian Emancipation. I think it was in 1857. In which he says that people who want freedom without struggle, want crops without plowing the ground. They want rain without thunder. And freedom never comes without struggle and power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has. It never will. And to me, that is the hallmark of the way he wrote things in his paper, the speeches that he made, the arguments that he made, the strategies that he developed and the way he dealt with Abraham Lincoln.

00:32:19:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

When, after the Civil War and all the travail and the economic suffering and the violence that Black people experienced. Later in his life when a Black woman from Tennessee named Kelly House started a what we would call today a reparations movement to try to get pensions for the old ex-slaves. And she had been a slave herself and all of the educated Black people, she was poorly educated and all the rest and all those ex-slaves who, former slaves, who were a part of her movement, were people who are poorly educated – they were poor. Many of them were desperate and they were old. And so she was criticized and the movement was criticized by many educated people as not being something that Black people should be proud of. And who are these people?

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And Frederick Douglass came out and said, I believe in what they're doing, because even the Russians, when they freed the serfs, they gave them a plow and some clothes. And when Blacks were freed, Negro was freed from slavery, what did we get? What did we do? So they are right to make these demands.

And so I think that even though people talk about Frederick Douglass, even when we talk about reparations today, and people never point out that Frederick Douglass as this giant of a man in our history was one of the major advocates for this.

The complexity of the abolitionist movement

01:34:07:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

There were a number of Black women who were deeply engaged in the anti-slavery movement, the abolitionist movement. And some became speakers on the circuit of going around to anti-slavery meetings and organizations and working with white women abolitionists and educating some of the white women about what they should be doing about this issue. All I can say is that they had to be courageous just as any women who did this at the time had to be, because having a woman by herself, going out to all these places and showing up and being willing to speak to audiences at sometimes on the way in and out, and sometimes in the building where they were speaking, there were people who were very angry about them, even having the nerve to speak out about this. And those who were able to, were writers, wrote many things that they published essays. They wrote some of the pamphlets. Some of them wrote speeches, for the big male anti-slavery figures like Garrison, for example, even Lloyd Garrison, for example. So that they were very, very visible in this movement.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Frances Watkins Harper, who was born in Baltimore as a free woman of color became educated. She was a poet. She wrote some wonderful poetry. She also was a strong anti-slavery person, abolitionist person, and worked with the white women in the women's suffrage movement too. And she traveled

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around the country going to anti-slavery meetings, showing up. And in fact, she was one of the people who was best known in the 19th century as a Black woman, as a public figure. And that may surprise people who think that there was nobody except Sojourner Truth or somebody they've heard of one of two people. But she was really the one that everybody looked to and when she was coming to town to speak, people wanted to hear her analysis of what they should be doing. And her writings are available for us to read and to look at, and she was respected by the men in the movement, by everybody who was in the movement. So I think that she's an important voice at this time.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

I remember something she wrote about how people thought that since white women were working for suffrage, that they might all be like, I think she put it like buttermilk drops all perfect people and that they weren't perfect and that you couldn't expect them, even if they got the vote, to do everything we would want to have done, because some of them would do the right thing and others wouldn't just like men wouldn't. But she put it in very poetical terms, but that what we should do is stand for them having the vote anyway, because of the ones that we could get to come over to our side and do what we needed. I just thought that was wonderful.

00:37:35:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

To the extent that people who have studied history or who read about it, know anything about the abolitionists movement, they would think that the people who led it were these white men, they've heard about like William Lloyd Garrison and you know, William Graham Sumner and so on. And that these were the people. Some of them may not have heard of Frederick Douglass, but if they did, they would have heard of him, but they would not

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have heard of the women who were involved in the movement and of some of the men who were involved in it.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

But there were a lot of people in cities and towns all around the country who were had groups of who were not only involved in the Underground Railroad, which people have heard of, even if they're not quite sure what it is, that spirited slaves, who were running away and helped them. But that people who were abolitionists and who went out and spoke about it and talked about it and were not celebrated at the time. And in particular, this was true of the women.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And it is clear that many of the abolitionists themselves, the white abolitionists, would not hire the Black folks, who they were supposed to be standing for being free to work. And they certainly wouldn't deal with them socially and look down on them and didn't consider them equal and free human beings. That was one of the faults of the movement and the ones who felt that way, the abolitionists who felt that way, the white abolitionists thought that it was enough that they were saving the poor slaves, the poor fugitives from their fate. And they had helped them to come along. It didn't mean that they had to uplift them or see to it that they were treated equally. And that was one of the things that tell us about the perpetuation of white supremacy. Even among people who are supposed to be allies and who were supposed to be doing good and who was supposed to be helpful. That's a little hard, isn't it? It's true though. It's true now and it was true then.

The Fugitive Slave Act

01:40:16:00

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in the 1840s was objected to and opposed, of course, by slaveholders and the people who supported them in the national government. But the court had said that states didn't have to help the slave catchers to catch a fugitive slave, if they came into a state that didn't have slavery. So by 1850, the Southerners insisted that a new law be passed, strengthening the Fugitive Slave Act because they want to be able to get their slaves back no matter where they ran away to.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And that act was passed, which had some very harsh provisions. Black people in the cities and towns where fugitive slaves came, banded together to protect them, along with some white allies who helped them on occasion to do it. And there was several rescue cases where they actually took the slave away from the slave catcher, who was like a bounty hunter that we have in the modern period to come to try to get the person so they could make some money for taking them back.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

They rescued them. They got into a big fight in the 1850s, in Pennsylvania, in a case where the slave catcher came and the whole town and the Black people there, and the white people opposed them. And they got into quite a flurry there, and one person got killed. But this was very important. This opposition that continued and continued and mounted, and people were determined to try to free as many slaves, ex-slaves or former slaves as they could. And if they did run away, find a way to keep them with them or to spirit them to Canada, do something so that they wouldn't have to go back to slavery.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And the opposition to slave catchers and rendition, as it was called, of fugitive slaves was one of the reasons why the Southerners eventually decided that they might have to leave the Union in order to protect their property.

How abolition came about

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Given the number of initiatives that were discussed and taken and the war itself and the behavior of the South and the responses of Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation and the debates and the Congress of the United States as time went on, it is clear that the abolition of slavery which was done by the actual 13th Amendment could not have happened without certain people in the Congress of the United States. Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, all those people in the Congress of the United States who were called Radical Republicans, all of those people who stood forward... Also that Lincoln began to see, he did what I call – he evolved over time. That's the best way to look at him. He was strategic and he moved that Lincoln saw, and we can see it if we look at the Lincoln monument and read the words down below there, you can see that he's talking about slavery as being a cause of the war by that time. He hadn't talked about slavery being the cause of war. He did that gradually as time went on and finally, in the end, he sees that it is that they seceded because of slavery – pure and simple.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

He's trying to save the Union and they see that he knew that you couldn't go back. There's no way to, once you let the genie out of the bottle, so to speak, Blacks were already in the service. They were already fighting. They weren't going to go back willingly and turn around and say, “well, okay, we'll just be

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slaves again," but that was not going to happen in large measure that the disruption, everything had been disrupted. And the question is, where do you go from here? And where do you go from here is you have to find something to offer to the people who have already have self-emancipated themselves or liberated themselves.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And so that abolition was not something that he would oppose. And there was no reason for him to do anything like that because after all the war had saved the Union, he was about saving the Union. He was pressed into circumstances where there was a war, secession and a war, the reality of it, and all of the people who had gotten killed and the refugees and all the horror that had taken place. So it was a reality that had taken place. And so he was very supportive of trying to do something, to acknowledge the freedom that already existed in large measure. But what was he going to do to put everybody back on the plantations. Now, you're going to be slaves. No, you move on from that reality. And then you try to think through what else you should do. And the real 13th amendment was the reality that the times call for.

00:46:29:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

The question of whether the Emancipation Proclamation resulted from a moral conscience on the part of Lincoln is an interesting one. But if you look at the facts and his behavior and everything that he did, and since you can't get inside his head, you can only look at what he did, everything he did up to the Emancipation Proclamation was done out of necessity and to save the Union. If you start all the way back with, when he told Horace Greeley, the newspaper editor in New York, that if he could save the Union without freeing any slaves he would do. So if he had to free all the slaves, you would

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do so – but he wanted to save the Union. He was clear about what he wanted to do. He was clear about not wanting slavery to expand out into the areas that were free soil.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

He had started that when he was a congressman back in the Congress, when an amendment came up to talk about what about the territory we got from Mexico? Will there be slavery there? And he voted no, not expansionism and keep the Union as time went on. So whether he morally thought that Blacks were human, I think he did. He knew Frederick Douglas was human. He spent a lot of time with him and other Black leaders and Black people in there as evidence that he didn't accept the notion that they were inhuman. But the idea that he did the Emancipation Proclamation for any other reason, other than what he said in the Emancipation Proclamation, which was, he was doing it out of military necessity. It may have made him feel better morally, he may have thought that morally, this makes sense. But given the manpower shortage that they had, it makes sense that he would do it for the reasons that he stated. And I have no reason to doubt him

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

People who believed that we should say Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation out of a sense of morality or a moral consciousness perhaps would feel better about Lincoln and him as the great man and the great president, if they could point to that and say, see, now you could argue on the other hand, supposedly Lincoln had decided not to issue the Emancipation Proclamation?

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

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Even if there had been this men's power shortage, which was real. Suppose he said, I don't really care if there is a manpower shortage, I'm not letting these people be free, no matter what. You have to lose, or we'll have to figure out some way to round them and make them fight or something, whatever it is. But I'm not going to do that while he could have done it, but given the reality that he was commander in chief and was president and wanted to save the Union and the Union was about to get defeated in his view, if something didn't happen, it makes sense that as a practical man, and he was practical, that he would do this.

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And I do not think it diminishes Lincoln at all to say that he saw the practicality of the Emancipation Proclamation and to frame it the way he did and that he didn't say a whole bunch of things about how, sorry I am these people are slaves and I should do whatever - the act stands for itself as something that made sense that he did. And I think it adds to his reputation rather than diminishes.

If the South won

00:50:43:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Historians have over the years tried to project. What would have happened if the South won the Civil War. And some people have said that slavery would never have been abolished and other people have said that, it wouldn't have lasted very long at all, because first of all, Black people wouldn't put up with it. And secondly, and that their allies wouldn't have put up with it. And that the economic circumstances that made slavery, a viable input to capitalism changed over time and with immigration and other things, the way the economy changed would have made it something that people didn't think

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they needed anymore. There's no way to answer the question as to how much it would have lasted. But I think that given the fact that some of the Black soldiers still had weapons, there were people who had been free, freed as a result of the war who weren't going back. And it would have been difficult to keep people in slavery after that war was over. So I think that the economy would have been transformed and it would have not lasted any longer than it did, but that's just a guess.

Depictions of the enslaved v. reality

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

First of all, you got the image of the Black person who obviously is the slave who actually works or doesn't work or is lazy or isn't it, and has to be controlled by the master and who has very little intelligence to use and is enjoys, in fact, being a slave when he's well taken care of by the master on the plantation, and probably couldn't do any better on his own. So you have that image of Black people. When in fact, all the studies that we've actually looked at concerning Black people in the records of that, we have that are there, Black people were just as interested in their families.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Black men were interested in their children. They couldn't spend time with them because they wouldn't let them, but they did. And they cared about each other and did what they could. And Black women were exploited. Sometimes they were deliberately made into breeders by slave owners, otherwise, and that Black children were mistreated when they were small kids. They were fed often on the plantation, out of a trough as if they were hogs or pigs lined up to eat. And the older children taking care of the younger children while

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their mothers were out in the field and fathers out in the field and couldn't take care of them. We know that these things happened to Black people during that period.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

There were people who had burns and scars on their legs by trying to build a fire in the little slave cabin where they had to stay when it was cold and putting the kids up next to it, to sleep and their legs would get burned. And many people, as they grew older, even when they were grown, they still had scars on their legs and they would recognize each other and talk about it when they saw each other. But that had happened to all of them intergenerationally.

Edmonia Lewis

00:54:41:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Edmonia Lewis is the sculptress who, as I recall, one of the things she did was a sculpture of Lincoln, and she also did sculptures and medallions of other leaders of the abolitionist movement and the anti-slavery movement during the war. She was a very courageous and imaginative woman— an adventuresome person, who in fact was the first person we know about, Black person and artists like that, who went off to Paris on her own and did things. And, but she was a marvelous artist.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

What made her think at the time in which she lived, that she could do all of those things that she did? What made her able to do them? To have that

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courage, that imagination along with her ability to do this and her consciousness about what should be done for our people.

White supremacists in the 21st century

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

People who in the century engage in racist behavior and are white supremacists by their behavior, in fact are simply perpetuating the long history racism that has existed in this country that started with the legalization of slavery and the exploitation of Black people as inputs into capitalism and continued from that time. Whether they understand it or not are simply in a long line of people who historically espouse the same views and engaged in similar behavior. And they are trying to make the world not change in a direction that is fairer and more equal, and are concerned about perpetuating their own image of themselves as being more important than all the other groups of people who are involved. And the inferiority of the other racial groups with whom they come in to contact

Acknowledging the full history of the country

00:57:21:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

It's important if you want to understand what's going on in the country today, and the kind of future we will have if we do nothing to change it, is to understand that there were conscious decisions made by the people who founded the colonies. When questions were raised about these Black people and what are we going to do with them, that at each step of the way, they had to decide that if they had, if they were a mulatto, they were still a slave. If they were a Christian, they were still a slave, whatever they were, they were still a

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slave. If they had to decide that the child follow the condition of the mother, when a white plantation impregnated a slave woman, and there was a child, they made all these conscious decisions and to use Blacks as inputs into their economic system, in order to prosper.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

And these decisions one by one were reinforced to make slavery legal and to make the definition of inequality for Black people and inferiority something real. And then it was perpetuated at each point when the question was raised again, as time went on, do we want to do anything about this? And when the answer was no, let's just perpetuate it, or the answer was, as time went on, let's make excuses for it, or let's, you know, whatever— ignore it. Until finally you fast forward to today and you still have people today who cannot accept that this is what the history of the country has been. And when you have them, some of them even try to redefine Lincoln to make him be a person who wasn't doing whatever it was he was doing. But you have to understand that there is a reality. Lincoln stands for acknowledging reality too, and trying to do something about it. And finally, when he came to the conclusion that the whole cause of the war and everything else had been slavery, he acknowledged that there was this race question at the heart of what was going on in the country. And so you have people still today who refuse to acknowledge that if you don't acknowledge it, then you can't solve the problem. If you make excuses, you push it away. You say, well, it really is this way. You have to acknowledge the history.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

It's important to acknowledge the history and acknowledge that people like Lincoln and all of the people who are in positions of power had to make decisions about things. And some of the decisions were hard and some of

them had results that might not be what we thought should happen. In the case of Lincoln. I think most people would think it was fine. And we're happy that the Union was not dissolved and that some steps toward emancipation took place and that abolition took place and so on. But these decisions are hard. And to acknowledge that you have as a country, a history of white supremacy is not easy, or to acknowledge that you have a history of capitalism being racist in its origins and in the labor that it uses and being perpetuated that way and that's at the heart of what your country does, that's not very nice, it's in fact ugly, but it's a *reality* and you can't overcome it. If you don't acknowledge the reality and learn the history of it and understand it and know it.

The gravity and consequence of Lincoln's assassination

01:01:24:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Lincoln's acknowledgement of the war, the Civil War, as a war to free the slaves and that it was all about slavery that led to all these other things, offended people who were - like John Wilkes booth and others - who were in fact adherents of the 'Lost Cause' as we call it. And it just made him appear in their minds, which they have already defined him as some kind of radical guy who was engaged in, he was a 'lover of Negroes' and that therefore, this just made it worse and that everything that he did meant that they needed to do something about him in order to vindicate their own point of view. And that they didn't know what else he would do, how far would he carry this vision that he seemed to have? Did he really mean to try to make Negroes equal or did he really mean... What did he really mean to do? And what would it mean after the war is over to have a Reconstruction or something under Lincoln? And what would he do about it? That this was something to be feared and this made him dangerous and not only obnoxious and objectionable, but

dangerous. And therefore it made sense to get rid of him, especially when you had Andrew Johnson to be the president of the United States.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

What Lincoln's assassination meant in reality, depends on how you interpret Lincoln. If you believe that Lincoln was the great white savior and he was going to make Blacks equal, and he was going to deliver Black people to the promised land and you were Black and you liked that or an ally and you liked that, then you think my goodness, if Lincoln had just lived, then everything would be fine. If you accept him for the reality of his slow strategic decision-making to deal with the problems that were at hand, you know that he was thinking about maybe letting a few Black people vote, that he was thinking about what is the solution to these Black soldiers, with these weapons going home? And what do we do about these women and children running around and they're poor the Black women children and so on? That he probably would have done something to do what we would call progress and be progressive, but knowing how he moved and what he did, it wouldn't have been fast. He would have slowly assessed the situation and done something about it as the opportunity presented himself. But whatever he did, you would know for Black people, it would not be what an Andrew Johnson would do. Because we knew what Andrew Johnson was – a poor white man from Tennessee who hated people who had anything and certainly hated Black people, or it didn't seem to care for them and had no vision about what to do. So that on balance you could argue that it would have been much better, couldn't have been worse, but we can't know.

Black resistance

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MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Black people have a history of resistance. Somebody asked me the other day, whether Black people we were in a caste system in America or something. I don't know why they asked me, but somebody asked me that. And I said, not really because in a caste system like- I've been to India and like what they have in India, the caste system, the people who are of the lower caste are taught that their religion means that they're supposed to stay there forever at the bottom. And the reason why the upper caste don't want them educated about Christianity and other religions which say all people are the same is because that defies the definition of you should be happy you're at the bottom because that's your place religiously. If you want to go to heaven or whatever their heaven is, that's the way you get there.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

Well, Black people have resisted from the day that Blacks were first of all, to the Virginia colony in 1619, there were Blacks on the continent before that, but 1619 from on... Blacks have always been, if you know the history of our people, you know that the history has somebody is always resisting. People don't just sit down and say, well, that's fine, this is what I'm supposed to do. So that if you are an activist today, and if you're concerned about issues and you're working with Black Lives Matter or other organizations, then you are part of a history. Each generation has to make its own dent in the wall of injustice. And the fact is that for Black people, there has been somebody in every generation that you can see that you can count, who has been making dents and people who are saying it may be this way, but it's not because it's supposed to be that way. And we're supposed to accept it. That has never been the case.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

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One of the things that has happened in the last few years has to do with the reaction to Trump getting elected president and the kind of rhetoric and the kind of talk that he talked about, questions of race and questions of inequality in all the rest of it. And in fact, the sort of horror that some people had when in 2016, he actually got elected because they couldn't believe that had happened. So that has opened up some pathways for people to talk about issues in a way that they had not even among the people who are powerful and who in fact are gatekeepers to decide what people can talk about to let people talk about it. That's opened a pathway to do that. The other thing is that we have always had instances of what we used to call police brutality.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

What we call now police violence against Black people. Because we know that police violence is simply an expression of how you protect the perpetuation of white supremacy and historians trace it all the way back to the slave patrols and all the way up through all the way and talk about it all these years. There seems to have been quite a bit of it in the last few years and the images are graphic. The media disseminates much more. There is more media and more ways to disseminate things than used to be the case.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

It used to take us a long time to find out that something happened somewhere or other and by the time we found out some other thing had happened and we were trying to figure out what to do about it. So now people know what happens and the images perpetuate a kind of consciousness and a kind of responsibility on the part of some people that it's time for them to do and say something. And when that happens all across the spectrum, then you have people wanting to analyze, people want to talk about, and then you have other people who would like us to stop talking

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about it, but feel like they need to do something to make us believe that they care so that maybe we will stop talking about it.

00:10:22:00

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

So when you put all these things together, you get an interest in more interest in learning about what has happened in the past, or trying to reinterpret or redefine it or analyze it or understand it and to see how we came to where we are today. And is there something we can do about it so that these painful things don't keep coming back again and again and again and again, undealt with.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

What I like most about what Lincoln did is when he came to the realization that the war was about slavery. And not only did he come to the realization personally, that's really not the most important thing, that he felt the timing was right to say it to the people of the country. That with all that had been said and done, by the time he gets to the second inaugural address, he says, what's at on the Lincoln monument at the bottom where he says what's on the Lincoln monument at the bottom, that you know how immoral it is for one person to think that they should live by the sweat of another person's brow. And that surely this kind of policy and attitude and everything else in the country couldn't last forever. And that he felt that he should say that! That he came to the realization after all we've been through after saving the Union, after all of this, and here we are, then I need to say this out loud to the people of the country, which is a different interpretation from the Kansas speeches he had been making all along from the beginning. It was all about the Union and this and that and whatever, but this was very clear. And I like that better than anything.

Slavery in the founding documents

02:11:53:22

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

The important thing about the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution is of course they don't mention slavery, but some people say, well, there was an inconsistency between the Constitution and the Declaration because the Declaration says, "all men are created equal" and the Constitution has all these things – Three-fifths Compromise and fugitive slaves and all these– fugitive persons, persons, held to labor in one state, not slaves. And isn't that inconsistent? No! The Declaration of Independence was rhetoric! It was a manifesto for why we go out and make this revolution. And that's what manifestos are. They use all kinds of language and talk about these high principles. But the Constitution was a document that they had to work with and get compromise over so that the nation could in fact exist and go forward as a nation. So in fact, it has all kinds of inartful phrases in it, and all kinds of things that don't quite say what they should say, but it was never intended to be an affirmation of the Declaration of Independence. The lucky thing, I guess, is that Jefferson didn't write all white men are created equal, he just said "all men are created equal." So at least that left a loophole.

MARY FRANCIS BERRY:

When Lincoln spoke of higher principles, he used the Declaration of Independence because he knew that's what it was. It was rhetoric and principle. While he knew that the South had a right to keep slaves in the South, under the Constitution. But the Constitution is not the Declaration of Independence.

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