EDNA GREENE MEDFORD
LINCOLN'S DILEMMA
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Edna Greene Medford Interview
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Interviewed by Jackie Olive & Barak Goodman
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Professor Edna Greene Medford interview, take one. Marker. Second sticks.

Slavery as an economic interest

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Slavery had always been a divider in the Nation, from its very founding actually. And so as time passed, it became even more contentious because even though slavery had existed throughout the nation, both in the North and the South, the North decided to rid itself of the institution after the American Revolution. Not because Northern men and women had any great feelings for people of African descent but because they'd already made their money from the slave trade and they were more industrialized and they were going in a different direction than the agricultural South. And so they were able to rid themselves of slavery. Most of the States gradually, but certainly by the 1830s, slavery had pretty much ended in the North with the exception of a few pockets.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The South was different because the South was an agricultural area and they felt that they needed the labor of enslaved people. That that was the cheapest

way to go and that it was a more effective labor system. But what that did was, it divided the nation in half because you had in Congress, people who were attempting to pass legislation that was more advantageous to an industrial kind of region versus people who are trying to pass legislation that's more agricultural, that's certainly advantageous to agricultural production. And so, this whole tussle about slavery had nothing to do with the humanitarian aspects of it. It had to do with the economic. So I think we have to say first and foremost, that it's not that you got good white men and women in the North who care about Black people. They are the same but they simply have different economic interest.

Rationalizing slavery

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think at the very beginning of the Nation, many people realized the contradiction between slavery and the equality espoused by the Founding Fathers and by Americans in general. But they saw it, at least the South did, the South saw it as a necessary evil, they needed the labor, they said, if they were going to work the plantations and the farms. That changes, however, as we get into the 19th century. By the 1830s especially, there's a turning point and people -- Southerners -- are seeing slavery as a positive good. And so they justify that whole idea of the Founding Fathers and equality, and the fact that they're still holding human beings enslaved, by saying "Well, maybe they're not quite human," "Maybe they're different from us," "They are the other," "Look what we did. We went to the African continent and we pull these barbaric people out of their continent and we brought them to America and we gave them civilization. And so if they're working for us, if we're selling

their children, if we're selling their wives away, it doesn't matter. In the long run, it's beneficial to them and it's beneficial to us."

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So it's almost like- it is like Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*, you know, the white man goes to Africa and rescues these people, brings them back to America. And so it's very much seen as a positive good. And the South also sees itself as superior to the North because they have this labor force that will allow them to think deep thoughts, and they are just much more refined than Northerners who actually are wedded to a free labor system. And they even argue that free laborers are treated so much worse than enslaved people because enslaved people are actually family. That's the argument that they convince themselves of.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Enslaved people are happy, they're carefree. They don't have any civilization except for what white men and women gave them. They don't love their families that same way white men and women do. They are a burden. They're more a burden than they are any kind of advantage to the South. They really convinced themselves of that. But at the same time, they were afraid to go to sleep at night because they understood that there was the possibility of a slave revolt.

The experience of being enslaved

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Slavery is not one thing throughout time or throughout the country. It depends upon the region. It depends upon the time that we're talking about.

It depends upon the kind of labor. So you might have enslaved people in an urban area who are actually living by themselves or living with a free Black family. They're enslaved, but they actually have a bit of freedom. And as long as they take that money that they've earned to their owners periodically, then they're okay. They're able to live almost independently of their owners.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But if you are on a plantation or if you are on a farm, it's very different because you've got that interaction with either the owner or the overseer, which can be even worse because that's a daily kind of interaction. And so you can expect to be beaten if you don't work hard enough. You can expect that you're going to be separated from your family. It happens all the time. People get sold down the river, as they say, meaning sold to the Deep South and they never see each other again. It's heartbreaking to look at some of the primary sources and see how desperately people tried to find each other, once slavery was over. They spent a lot of time on the road trying to find their families, trying to reestablish them. It's just heartbreaking stories.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But in terms of labor, if they're on the plantation, they're getting up before dawn, they're going into the fields, they're working until 10 or so. They get something to eat at that point, they go back into the fields. If they're engaged in harvest, then they are working very, very long hours. So it's not unusual to be working 18 hours a day, if you're bringing in the harvest. Whippings are very common. Brandings can be common. People get a foot chopped off or a hand chopped off as punishment. It's a horrific situation.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But I think the worst part of slavery, whether you're in an urban environment or you're in a rural environment, or you're working on the docks or you're

working on the plantation, it's the separation of families. It's not about the number of whippings you get. It's not about the exploitation of your labor. It's about the separation of families.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

What is also horrific is that Black men and women cannot protect their own families because their families belong to the owners. And that means in every sense of the word. So an African-American woman is subject to sexual assault, not just from her white owner, but from his friends, from the neighbors, from his relatives, whoever is there feels that they have license to assault Black women. And sometimes they're assaulted by their own men as well. And so it is especially difficult to be a woman in slavery. And especially because women who are of childbearing age are expected to have children, but continue to work into the fields up to the time that they're delivering.

Resistance to slavery

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The resistance movement began long before African people left the continent. Africans were resisting slave catchers and slave traders in their villages. As some boats were going up the rivers, they were attacking them, and onboard the ships during the middle passage, they are resisting as well. And of course, when they get to America, they continue to resist. We sometimes think that there were no slave revolts in the United States because we have so many of them happening in the Caribbean where Black people are vastly in the majority, and that's never the case in the United States except in a couple of states.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But we have resistance to slavery among African-Americans as early as the 1600s. Certainly by 1712, we've got a revolt in New York. We've got another conspiracy in 1741 in New York. We have the Stono Revolt in 1739 in South Carolina. And of course, when we enter the national period, we have resistance to slavery through Gabriel's Revolt in 1800 in Richmond and Nat Turner's Revolt in 1831 in South Hampton County, Virginia. And we have individuals who are suing for their freedom during the American Revolution and in the wake of the revolution. And so by the 1830s, when the abolitionist movement becomes better organized and societies are formed, you have Black men and women very actively involved there as well.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You've got the Garrisonians, Black people are joining that organization, the American Anti-Slavery Society. You've got African-American abolitionists going to Europe and lecturing about slavery in the United States and raising funds to help the abolitionist movement. You've got Black women involved in the abolitionist movement. We spend so much time talking about Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, as we should because these were extraordinary Black women, but there were many other Black women who were involved as well. And not just as ancillary, as peripheral people. These are folk who are writing and actually contributing to *The Liberator*, the anti-slavery newspaper of William Lloyd Garrison. They are writing and making contributions to the *Anglo African* in New York and the *Christian Recorder* and other lack newspapers.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

They're going on the lecture circuit, both at home and abroad. They're raising funds for the cause. They're doing a variety of things. They're writing poetry, they're writing anti-slavery tracks. So women are not just sitting by the

wayside, waiting for men to do the job, and that's extraordinary because this is a period where the cult of domesticity exists, where the role of women is supposed to be in the household, taking care of the children. They're not supposed to be on the lecture circuit and these Black women are out there doing that. white women are as well, but it's extraordinary for Black women because Black women certainly are not respected and they certainly aren't expected to be out there lecturing or writing. But they're doing it and they're very influential.

Family separation among enslaved people

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The domestic slave trade was at its height in the 1820s and through the 1840s and '50s, and in some instances, people were shipped southward. You know, the idea of being sold down the river, it meant going from the upper South to the lower South from places like Virginia and Maryland to places like Georgia and Mississippi, Alabama, Texas. And so there were instances, however, when people were transported across land in coffles, even if they were transported by sea. Once they were back on land, they could also be transported across land. And so they were chained together and it was the most horrific sight for people who had any kind of humanity at all. So you had adults, sometimes you had children in those coffles as well, and so to me, the tragedy is not so much how they were transported, but what they left behind. These were families that were destroyed. People never saw their children, their wives, their husbands again.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so when we talk about the horrors of slavery, we need to look at that. We need to look at the separation. After the war, the first thing African-Americans did was try to reunite their families. So they were on the roads constantly, not because they were lazy and they didn't want to work, but because they were trying to find husbands and wives, parents looking for their children. And in many instances, they were simply not able to reunite with family members who had been sold away.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Chattel slavery was a business like any other, even though the commodity was human beings. People were held in pens the same way you would animals. They were sold away. Mothers, babies were snatched out of their arms as the mother was sold away. There was the horror of knowing that at the beginning of the year, after the celebration of Christmas, at the beginning of the year, the expectation was that someone would be sold away and you never knew who that would be. And so Black people were in constant fear of being separated, of having their freedom reduced even more because an owner was a gambler and he may have gambled away his enslaved laborers, at least some of them. You had instances, of course, of people dying and their enslaved population was divided among their heirs.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So Black people never could be comfortable in knowing that they would always be together, that their children would not be sold away, that their husbands would not be sold away. It was one of the most heinous aspects of their enslavement. It was a business institution and it was governed by how much profit could be made, and that was truly part of the tragedy.

Enslaver trade journals

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Trade journals benefited the owners to the extent that it helped them ensure that their property would be productive and that the property would not resist their enslavement. And so any indications of how to treat an enslaved person to get them to work harder but without endangering their lives was something that was not humanitarian. It wasn't anything that was to really benefit the enslaved person, but to get more work out of the human property and to ensure that they would resist their enslavement as little as possible. Actually, I don't think that those journals really mattered that much because any owner would have understood how to deal with his enslaved laborers.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I'm always struck by the Willie Lynch letter where supposedly someone had discovered this letter from a West Indian in the 1700s trying to instruct American planters on how to deal with their enslaved laborers and how to divide Black people. First of all, the letter never rang true to me. It made absolutely no sense. The language was really strange for that time period, but also planters didn't have to be instructed on how to punish their enslaved laborers. They knew because they grew up in the system, so they understood what would work and what would not work. They didn't need anyone from the outside to tell them how to deal with people that they saw not as human beings, but as property.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I'm sure that those journals existed, you know, to benefit some planters, but they really had no purpose because I just don't see how they would have assisted an owner in getting more productivity out of his laborers. They already assumed that the way you do it is to beat them half to death or to

separate them, punish them by separating them from their families or by maiming them. They had already established their own practices long before these journals existed. Now, I think the journals were useful in terms of the farming advice that they gave. There were journals in the '30s to the '50s and into the '60s that talked about how you can get the most out of your land.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Because you know, as we recall, land, at least in the upper South, was already depleted because of overproduction. So the land was exhausted. There were no nutrients there. Nutrients had to be put back in the soil, planters had to allow the land to lay fallow for a while or to plant clover there or to use bat guano to fertilize it. So those journals would have been very important for that kind of instruction. But I don't know that they were really that useful in terms of teaching planters how to handle their enslaved laborers.

Black political action

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Well, we sometimes think that because the majority of African-Americans did not have voting rights in the period, in the Antebellum Period specifically, that there was no political voice. And that's not true. Because people are able to express themselves politically in many other ways other than just by voting. And so in terms of their involvement in the abolitionist movement, they're on the anti-slavery lecture circuit, they're traveling all over the north. They're not going the south, but they're traveling all over the North campaigning against slavery. But they're doing more than that.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

It's not just about ending slavery. It's about elevating their positions to that of white men and women as well. So people who are already free are pushing for that equality. So they are concerned that they can't ride on the street cars in the same way. You know, they have to be on the outside. Even if it's inclement weather, they can't get inside of the street car. They can't send their children to schools in the North in many instances, in an integrated way. They don't have access to jobs, to some of the better jobs. They don't have access to decent housing in many instances. So they are pressing for those kinds of things. They're doing it in terms of speeches. Douglass, certainly, is constantly talking about those kinds of things. Not just slavery, but equal rights as well.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

They're trying to make America live up to the tenants that it claims were important to the founding of the nation. You have women who were very much involved in that political movement as well. So you've got Black women writing, just as Black men are. Although we don't know a lot about them, we have to dig sometimes. But because of the scholarship in the last 10 or 15 years in women's studies, especially in women's history, we are uncovering those kinds of things.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You have Black men who are speaking from the pulpit, who had newspapers. They're publishing in newspapers. You're having people write into newspapers. There's all of this agitation going on. And in fact, since the 1830s, you have a Negro Convention movement, where they are meeting nationally to discuss the issues that affect Black America. That's a political movement to me. They're involved in party politics. You know, the Liberty party, for instance, where they can vote. You know, they are voting. There are very few of them who are voting, but where they can, they do. But there are

all of these ways in which they are very much involved in a political movement.

Lincoln believes in the right to rise

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln is saying that the country was founded on the principle that all people were created equal and that included people of color as well. Now he didn't mean by that, that African-Americans or Native Americans for that matter were equals to white men. He didn't believe that was the case, but he believed that everybody should have equality of opportunity. Historians use the phrase when they're describing Lincoln's ideas about equality is that Lincoln believed that everybody had the “right to rise” and slavery could not allow you to rise.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so that's the argument he's trying to make that the nation was founded on this principle of equality for all people. And so when you put yourself out there to the world saying, "We are a democracy where everybody is treated equally, or everyone has the same opportunity to rise," but you are holding people enslaved, you're making a lie of your founding principles. And he sees that as, as a very difficult thing to deal with. He calls slavery a “monstrous institution.” He recognizes it is not what the country should be involved in, but he's not somebody who believes in equality the way we think of equality.

Lincoln and his father

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln had a very difficult childhood, because he had a father who was illiterate, who didn't care about education at all and Lincoln was a child who cared everything about education. I mean, he worked hard. He had a very strong work ethic, but he also had an intellectual side and it was something his father could never understand. And so his father did hire him out to people to work, and you know, Lincoln did think of himself in some way as enslaved. But I think we put too much attention on that. I think that when, when historians argue that Lincoln cared so much about slavery was because he had been enslaved in a way himself, all children are being exploited by their parents during that period, not just Lincoln. It's not something that's uncommon. Lincoln may have been a bit sensitive, more sensitive than others because connected with that idea of him, his labor being exploited was that he was being denied an education. So I think the two have to go hand in hand.

Lincoln's reverence for the Constitution

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln had always been someone who cared first and foremost about preservation of the Union. He was so thoroughly wedded to the Constitution and he didn't see any way out. If you're going to follow the Constitution, you have to be aware that enslaved people are property and you cannot mess with people's property. And it does sound cruel to us today to look back at that and say, you know "He chose the nation over human rights." It's what he did and that's hard to take. But when you read more and more about his beliefs, his actions, it makes a bit of sense.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You know, Lincoln has always been an enigma and he will always be an enigma. He is one of the most complex historical figures I've ever studied. And, you know, there are people who studied him for much longer than I have, and they haven't figured him out yet. And I remember, years ago, I thought, "Oh, I got this guy. I know exactly what he's about." And I open another document and I see something totally different. So he's a man, I think, who's really struggling with the Constitution. He's struggling with his own value system. But a lot of times that connection to the Constitution overrides everything else. And we can't forget that about him. It's a part of who he was.

Lincoln's plans for gradual and compensated emancipation

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln is not only late to the idea that enslaved laborers should be confiscated, he really does not like it. He thinks it's against the Constitution because this is private property and you can't take people's property without compensating them. And so in his plan, in each plan, he's talking about the Delaware plan, these people are going to be compensated for the loss of their laborers if they had been willing to accept his plan. When he's talking about other instances, even with the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 1862, Lincoln is talking about compensation. And only when the Confederacy declines to take him up on his offer, does he on January 1st, 1863, declare that these people are free and nobody gets compensated.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But they also get compensated in the District of Columbia in April of 1862. But that's not Lincoln's efforts, that's congressional effort there because

Washington is under the purview of Congress. It is not a state. And so Congress can decide what's going to happen there. But Lincoln is very uncomfortable about taking private property and not compensating people for it, or not allowing them to have a say in it. I mean, his plan was four pronged. If you're going to emancipate, it has to be gradual. It has to be with the consent of the local people, that there has to be compensation for the owners, nothing for the enslaved people who've been doing this forever, but compensation to the owners. And oh, by the way, colonization, because we got to take them out of the country. Not so much because they don't deserve to be in the country, but because Lincoln probably understood white men and women better than most that they were not going to abide living side-by-side with Black men and women, so he thought it would be a major problem.

The problem was though, his solution was remove Black people, not try to talk your people into understanding that Black people had a right to be in this country as much as they did, if not more so, because Black people built the country in many instances. But he didn't see it that way. He thought that they should simply be asked to leave.

Lincoln's southern roots

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Well, I think we first have to remember that Lincoln was a son of the South. He may have been born in Kentucky on the frontier, and he may have moved to Indiana and then on to Illinois, but he was a son of the South with the same kinds of Southern sensibilities as many other Southern men and women, for that matter, many Northern men and women, because the attitude during that period was that Black people are inferior. Now what Lincoln did

recognize, he thought that Black people were inferior, but he says it wasn't because it's an innate inferiority, it's because of slavery. It's because of what slavery had done to people. But, you know, he really did see an inferiority there. He was able to make distinctions however. I don't think he ever saw Frederick Douglass as inferior.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

He recognized that Douglass was right in his league, if not more so, because Douglass was better traveled than Lincoln. Lincoln never went to Europe or any of these other places. I started to say Douglass was a more prolific writer than Lincoln. I don't know. Lincoln did a lot of writing too. But the men were- if Lincoln ever thought of someone equal to himself, it would have to be Douglass, even though Douglass was born into slavery.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But Lincoln's Southern roots made a difference. And I don't think that Lincoln actually had enough interaction with Black people initially to understand that people were different. You know, that there were all types of Black people just as they were all types of white people. He had a friendship with William Florville, you know, the man who cut his hair. He had relationships with people in the White House. Apparently was fairly close to William Slade, his valet, and that kind of thing. He could be very compassionate to individual Black people. But in terms of looking at Black people as a whole, he saw them as inferior because of what had happened with slavery.

Lincoln and colonization

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Historians have argued that Lincoln's involvement with colonization was just a smoke screen. It was an attempt to ensure white Americans that if Black people were ever emancipated, they would not have to live with them. They would not have to deal with them in their communities, because they would all be sent outside of the country. And so you do have Lincoln at the same time that he's talking about colonization, also writing the emancipation proclamation. And so when he's meeting with those five Black men at the White House in August of 1862, he's telling white Americans, "Something is coming, but you don't have to worry about it because my position is that these Black people should be sent out of the country."

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Now, he always said that he was okay with voluntary deportation. He didn't believe in forcing people out of the country, but the argument that he made to those five Black men was not well received by the African-American community, because what he was doing was he was blaming Black people for the war and suggesting that the two races could not co-exist. Now, perhaps there was some truth in that, because of course we know that after the war ends, there's a great deal of tension between the races. There's a great deal of violence on the part of Southern whites against the newly emancipated. So Lincoln understood his people and understood the challenges they would have in accepting Black people as free, and certainly as accepting them as equal and having full citizenship in the United States.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So this is one of the complexities of the man. While he's writing a document that's going to promise freedom to African-Americans, he's also talking about sending them out of the country. The real irony is that he must've known that once they were freed, not many Black people were going to leave the country. This was the home of their birth. This is where their ancestors were buried.

This is the country they had helped to build. And there was no way most of them were going to leave, and he must have known that.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I wouldn't say that he was not committed to colonization. I think that if he could have convinced the majority of African-Americans to leave the country on their own volition, on their own accord, he would have gone along with that. He certainly was involved in the attempt to establish a settlement of freed people in central America where he expected them to mine coal. He thought that would be an ideal occupation for Black men. He certainly supported the idea of sending more people to Liberia. There was already, of course, a settlement there. There was a country there that had been developed by the American Colonization Society. And so he was willing to send more African-Americans so Liberia. And of course, he was very much involved in the Haitian venture as well, where Black people, about 500 of them, were actually sent to Ile-a-Vache, or Cow Island as it was called, off the coast of Haiti.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But he did have to send a ship to pick up the survivors because quite a few of them died in the first few months there because provisions were not made for them. They needed medical care, they needed food, clothing, lodging, and that was not set up properly by the people that he had entrusted to do that. And in fact, he was very much behind the recognition of Liberia and Haiti during this period as independent countries. And the argument has been made, quite successfully, that he did that because he wanted to be able to negotiate more easily with those areas and hoped that they would be willing to take formerly enslaved people in because of that relationship with the United States.

The abolitionist movement

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The abolitionist movement by mid-century, by the 1850s, is a very important movement. It had been though since the 1830s, there is that transition at 1830. It's a watershed period. And so it goes from, the ideas about slavery go from at least the Southern perspective that it's a necessary evil to it's a positive good. But part of that is being brought on by the fact that you've got these abolitionists, you've got men and women, women play a very important role in abolitionism, Black people and white people who are believing that the country would be better off without slavery. And they are agitating for it to end. So you have anti-slavery societies that are being formed. You have American anti-slavery societies getting together with English anti-slavery societies to try to end slavery in America. After all, because the United States declared its independence from Great Britain, slavery lasted longer in the United States because slavery in the British colonies had ended by the 1830s, but of course the western world colonies, but it continues in the United States.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But there are people who are fighting desperately to end it. The 1850s are a critical period. It's a critical- a crucial decade as it's called because you have so much happening. You have the Compromise of 1850. You have the slave trade in Washington, D.C. ending in 1850. You have by 1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe's. It makes a difference because in a fictional way it shows Northerners what slavery was like. There are other people who were writing about it long

before Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass has published his book before then, but people aren't paying as much attention to a formerly enslaved man, as they are to someone like Harriet Beecher Stowe, interestingly enough. You've got Kansas-Nebraska. You've got the formation of the Republican Party and the near destruction of the Democratic Party, and definitely the destruction of the Whig Party.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You've got Dred Scott. You got John Brown's raid at the end in 1859. So all of these things are converging and abolitionists are in large measure, pushing these, pushing forward. That doesn't mean that all abolitionists cared about Black people. There were abolitionists who simply did not want to live in a country where slavery existed. So when the war started, there were abolitionists, who said, "Okay, we've done our job. Let the South go. We don't have to worry about slavery anymore. So what if there are almost 4 million people enslaved in the South? That's their problem. That's the Confederacy's problem. It's not our problem anymore." But Black abolitionists and abolitionists who were always concerned about the welfare of Black people are pushing and saying, "No, we have to get rid of this institution now. We cannot just let the South go and keep these people enslaved."

Frederick Douglass

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The premier Black abolitionist during this period was Frederick Douglass. I don't think there's anyone who stands above him. There were people like William Pennington. There were John Sella Martin, many, many other people, Charlotte Forten, who later is very instrumental in the South helping people

make a transition from slavery to freedom, any number of Black abolitionists, but Douglass is the one who stands out the most. Douglass used his pen and the bully pulpit to fight against slavery. He was perfect as an abolitionist because he knew firsthand what slavery was like. He had freed himself and had come to the North and had started with William Lloyd Garrison on the anti-slavery lecture circuit, and just became a darling of the abolitionists. Went to Europe. I remember going to Ireland years ago, Northern Ireland and turning a corner and there was this gigantic mural of Frederick Douglass because he had been there. He had been in Ireland in the 1840s I think it was. So just an incredible force to be reckoned with, someone who was brilliant, had taught himself, just an extraordinary human being. And I hate it when I hear people say he was an extraordinary African-American, he was an extraordinary human being, period, of any race. And actually, better- I love Lincoln's language, but I think I liked Douglass' even more. I love to quote him.

Frederick Douglass' relationship with Lincoln

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Clearly these are two men, Lincoln and Douglass, who started on a different path to life. They're both born poor, of course, but Douglass born enslaved, Lincoln, just born poor on the frontier. But both men had a kind of ambition, and we don't normally think of Lincoln as being ambitious, but he was, he was very ambitious. We don't think of Douglass as being ambitious for himself, but he was. And so these two men who- Douglass was a thorn in Lincoln's side most of the war. I mean just really trashed him, but the two men learned to respect and like each other. And that's the interesting thing. I think it's a lesson for us that enemies, you know people can start off as

enemies, but they can learn to respect each other and hold different opinions about how you get from point A to point B, but still have some level of respect for each other.

The Dred Scott decision

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Dred Scott, first of all, was an enslaved man who was taken into free territory to live and into a free state as well. And so abolitionists who had befriended him, decided to use him as a test case. And so they brought the case indicating that because he had lived in free territory, he was entitled to his freedom. Well, I think there were four trials at the state level. He won a couple, lost a couple. The case finally went to the Supreme Court, the U.S. Supreme Court, and the court was dominated by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney. And Taney was a Southern slaveholder, a racist before we had the word racism in our vocabulary, but he certainly was.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And Taney, who could have simply said that, you know, Dred Scott had no standing in the court, went further than that. He said, Scott had no standing in the court, so he couldn't bring a suit because he wasn't a citizen of the United States, and no Black man or woman was a citizen of the United States. He didn't stop there. He said, Black people had no rights that white people were bound to respect. And finally, and the thing that really annoyed Lincoln and anti-slavery people, especially anti-expansionist, was that because enslaved people were property, slave owners could take that property anywhere they darn well pleased. And so if they wanted to go into the North, they could. If they wanted to go to California, they could. If they wanted to go

into that territory that had been reserved for free white men and women, they could do that.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so Lincoln gets upset about that, because first and foremost, he understands that this thing is going to expand and it's not going to die a natural death. But the other thing is that if you allow slavery into the Western territories, what does that do to poor white men and women, poor farmers who now are going to have to compete with slave labor. And that is something that Lincoln cannot abide. His anti-expansionism is very much about the protection of poor white men and women from the institution of slavery.

The Fugitive Slave Act

00:47:06:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Escape to the North did not guarantee freedom for African-Americans. Slave catchers were constantly being sent to the North to bring people back into slavery. And it's especially bad after 1850 with the compromise because you had the Fugitive Slave Act that's passed. Now it's not the first Fugitive Slave Act that we had, but it certainly had teeth. It did a lot more than the others did. And to be as un-American as you could be, what it did was it established a commission and the commission received more money for hearing the case and returning the alleged enslaved person back to his owner then they received for letting the person go. How un-American can you get? But that's what happened. And oh, by the way, the alleged runaway could not testify in his own defense or against any white person. So it was totally unfair to African-Americans.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You have instances where states are passing personal liberty laws, Northern states trying to get around it. You have instances of people- slave catchers are trying to bring people back to the South, so they're going into a city like Boston, and they're pulling people out and you have mobs that gather to try to stop it. But ultimately what happens is, in most instances, these people are returned to slavery if they were ever enslaved to begin with, because there are people who were not enslaved, who are kidnapped and sent to the South as well, taken to the South. So it's a hideous situation.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

After 1850, what happens is a lot of people who had been living in the North for years decide it's no longer safe. So they make their way to Canada. And among those people were 29 members of my family who were free, who were not enslaved, but were free and still did not feel safe in Virginia after having been there for all those years. So they packed up and they went to southern Ontario. And so lots of people were trying to get out of the country because they knew that their lives, you know, would not be safe if they stayed within the United States. And all of this is happening within that decade, that crucial decade.

The question of slavery's expansion

00:49:48:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln was one of those anti-slavery men. He was not an abolitionist before the war. He was an anti-slavery man who believed that slavery was morally wrong, but that nothing could be done about it, where it already existed in the States because of the constitution. The Constitution protected property

and enslaved people were property, human property, but they were still property. And so Lincoln felt that there was nothing that could be done about it, except that it could be contained. The Constitution did, he believed, permit Congress to intervene in terms of the territories, and so they could keep slavery out of the territories. They couldn't take slavery out of the States, but they could contain it. And so that's what Lincoln was attempting to do. And along comes Kansas-Nebraska in 1854. It's occurring because Stephen A. Douglas, one of the most prominent Democrats of that era wanted a transcontinental railroad with the terminus in Chicago.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So he wanted to have it run from Chicago northwards as opposed to a southern route. And in order to do that, they had to actually organize the territory, the western territories, Kansas and Nebraska area. But in 1850, because of land that had been ceded after the Mexican War, there was a compromise – called the Compromise of 1850, it was a series of measures, it wasn't just one – but they talked extensively about what to do with that territory. And so they never came to a real conclusion except to say that when those areas were organized, then the local people should be able to decide through a concept of popular sovereignty, exactly what they wanted to do. Did they want to be a place where slavery existed or did they want to be an area where there was freedom.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so, what happens however though, that territory that Douglas is talking about organizing had already been settled by the Missouri Compromise. And what the Missouri Compromise said was any territory North of 36 degrees, 30 minutes, with the exception of Missouri would come into the Union as free states. And those below 36 degrees, 30 minutes, would come in as States

where there would be slavery with the exception of Missouri, which would be allowed to come in as a slave state. And so it had already been settled.

So what happens though, Stephen A. Douglas pushes for this idea of popular sovereignty, and so you have a mini civil war in Kansas. That's when John Brown goes in and does his thing, and we're still trying to judge him on exactly whether or not he was right or wrong to actually kill, you know, five people in the middle of the night. But that's another story. So Lincoln is enraged at the idea that the Missouri Compromise is being overturned. You know, law that had been settled, you know, is now overturned. And so you got this possibility of the expansion of slavery. So he understands that slavery is not going to die a natural death. It's just going to expand and expand. So that brings him back into politics.

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think the concern was that if you allowed slavery to expand into the territories, where would the South stop. You know, would they go for Cuba? And they did have designs on Cuba. Where else would they expand the institution? There were some people though who believed that it was a moot point because slavery would never take hold in that area. That wasn't the kind of environment where slavery would thrive. But I think that what we forget is that enslaved people did so much more than agriculture, you know. They were involved in mining, you know. They were involved in railroad building. They were involved in tobacco factories, for goodness sake. And so the people who argued it's a moot point, I think we're absolutely wrong. If it had been allowed to expand without a war, who knows what would have happened.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

00:54:27:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln had always believed that the founding fathers had expected slavery to be contained and had expected it to die naturally. He believed that the only reason why slavery was allowed in the first place was because there never would have been an United States without it, because the Southern States would have never been a part of the Union if the rest of the Nation had not approved of them continuing with slavery. But he felt that the founding fathers believed that at some point slavery would end. And so they don't even mention the word slavery in the Constitution. They talk about others held to labor. That's enslaved people, but they never mentioned that. And so he believed that the founding fathers thought that slavery was a cancer on the nation, but you couldn't just get rid of it because you might destroy the national body if you did that.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so the fact that Kansas-Nebraska occurs, he just doesn't see any way out anymore. It has taken away his argument that, "Oh, eventually it'll die out." Because Lincoln and others were more than happy to wait until it died a natural death. I think that's what we forget, sometimes Lincoln was not an abolitionist, initially. He was more than happy, he would have been willing to wait into the 20th century, you know, for slavery to have died or some other distant period.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But the Kansas-Nebraska act was extremely important. It destroyed a party. It destroyed the Whig party. It destroyed Lincoln's party, but it also gave birth to the Republican Party. And the Republican Party was very successful in a very

short period of time. Let me remind however that the Republican Party of then was not the Republican Party of today and the Democratic Party then was not the Democratic Party of today. They have switched.

The cause of Secession

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

By the time of the election, Lincoln was better known because of the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. Not because Lincoln was so prominent during that period, but Stephen A. Douglas was. So the fact that Lincoln was challenging him, elevated Lincoln's stature as well. But what really gave Lincoln that push was the Cooper Union address in February of 1860. It made him stand out among other candidates because he was a moderate. He was not a radical. He talked about how he felt the constitution was meant to, you know, have slavery end eventually so he wasn't a flaming abolitionist, because abolitionists were hated during that period by many Americans. And so he stood out because of that.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so by the time he is elected, southerners are already primed for a fight. They are very afraid, even though Lincoln is a moderate, even though he's saying he has no desire to interfere with slavery, he says it over and over again, even before 1860, so they know that. But they are so concerned that he's going to attack slavery, that South Carolina, you know, the problem child of the South for a long period of time, because they were talking about seceding in the 1830s as well. But South Carolina decides that this is it, they're going to secede from the Union. And after South Carolina leaves, Mississippi comes along and does the same.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so by the time that Lincoln is inaugurated in March of 1861, you have seven states that have already left the Union and then four more joined after the Fort Sumter incident. But of course, the four states that remain in the Union that are slave holding states, but they weren't terribly supportive of the Union, they were still very much- they were pro Confederates: Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri. I mean they may have been Union States, but they were about as close to being in the Confederacy as you can get.

Securing the border states

00:59:08:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln was so concerned that the Confederacy would expand that the four remaining slave holding states would join the Confederacy, so he spent a great deal of time in the first couple of years of the war trying to get the border states to end slavery on their own telling them that, you know, Congress would help them, actually pay the owners of these enslaved people and that Congress would appropriate money for colonization because you don't want to keep these Black people in the states once they're free. Heaven forbid that they get out of control. And so he was saying, well, we can get Congress to help pay for them to be moved someplace else outside of the country. And Congress does do that, Congress does appropriate money for that reason. So Lincoln is very much concerned about Kentucky as well. I mean, he really did feel that if Kentucky left the Union, everybody else was going to leave as well, at least in terms of the slave holding states. So he does everything he can to keep them in position.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln believed that if the four Union states that were slave holding states joined the Confederacy, it would strengthen the Confederate cause and that the Union would be split forever. So he tried desperately to keep them in and was much more conciliatory for a long period of time than he needed to be.

Lincoln's primary goal of unification

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EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The country is so divided by the time that Lincoln is on his way to Washington, that when he gets to Baltimore, his life is threatened and he has to disguise himself and find his way to Washington under disguise, because there's fear that he's going to be assassinated. But you also have in Washington, people, Congressmen actually trying to do something to stop what they could see was a war brewing. And so you have conferences that attempt to bring the two sides together. You have all sorts of things occurring. None of them that work. You have the Corwin Amendment, that actually had it been passed would have been the 13th Amendment and what it would have done would have been to approve slavery forever. It stated that the country could never pass a constitutional amendment against slavery. So it's ironic that the 13th Amendment that actually ended slavery started out as the Corwin Amendment saying we're going to guarantee that slavery can continue where it already exists.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

When Lincoln comes to the White House, what he's interested in is bringing the Union back together. He's not thinking about ending slavery, nothing like that. He's talking about bringing the Union together. He doesn't speak openly in that transition, in that period from when he's elected to when he's

inaugurated, but he's writing letters to people and he's telling them what he will and will not do. And he's saying, you know, “I'll tolerate just about anything, except I'm not going to tolerate the expansion of slavery.” His reason for that, and I find it interesting, is this area is reserved for white men. He doesn't talk about Black people deserving freedom. He talks about that area in the west is reserved for the use of white men.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so when he issues his first inaugural address, he's emphasizing Union. In fact, what he's saying is I will not touch your domestic institutions and that's code word for "I'm going to keep my hands off of slavery, so don't worry about that.” And he even agrees to continue enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act. Now he didn't need to do that, not really. You have these people who have left the nation and he's protecting their institution. It is absolutely amazing. So he is bending over backwards to be conciliatory to these folk who have turned their backs on the Union.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think Lincoln was desperate to ensure that the nation be reunited. I don't think he forgot that slavery was a bad thing, but I think he was more concerned about what was right in front of him. And what was in front of him was preserving the Union. And that's the position he kept for quite a while. Congress was quite a bit ahead of him early on in the war. Congress was ready to strike against slavery in whatever way they could. Lincoln was a little bit slower with it. And the argument has always been that because he was cautious, he got the country to the right place, but it could have gone so wrong. When you think about how superior the Confederate forces were, they may have been a smaller force than the Union, they didn't have the numbers, but they had superior generals for a long time.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And they won victory after victory after victory. This could have gone very badly, and if it had, the North would have still existed, of course, but the South would have been off to itself and slavery would have continued way into the 20th century. I mean, the argument was, well you know, 20th century economy just could not have fit slavery, and yes, it could have. And also I think people forget that slavery was more than an economic institution. It was a social institution as well. It was one of social control and that kind of control would have lasted, who knows, to this day. There would have been no reason to change it at least for Southerners who had the power.

01:05:31:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I remember reading a piece from W.E.B. Du Bois in The Crisis magazine. I think it was published in 1922. And he talks about Lincoln's contradictions; you know, he's somebody, you know, who loves freedom but is willing to accept slavery for however long it takes. And that he is like that, he is someone who understands how damaging slavery is. And that's the thing. I mean there are people in the North at least who don't understand that. They really do buy the idea that slavery is mild, you know, that it's beneficial to Black people. Lincoln understands it's not, but still he's willing to allow the institution to continue for as long as it needs to die a natural death. So the contradictions are there. The contradictions are there for a lot of people, but the difference with Lincoln is he does grow.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You know, I used to sort of scoff at that when someone said, "Well, you know, you have to understand the man grows", and went "Yeah, right. How many people had to die before he grew?" But he did. He did change his attitudes

about slavery. Now, it took a war to do that, mind you, but he could have simply sat there and done nothing about what was happening with slavery in the South. He could have simply taken the time to allow the Confederate States back into the Union, without anything changing with slavery. And he did not do that. And so I think we need to give him credit, at least for that.

Slavery is an advantage for the Confederate army

01:07:19:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The interesting thing about the progression of the war is that Northerners thought it was going to be an easy victory, that they were going to win at Bull Run and that, you know, everything would be fine after that. And the Confederates won at Bull Run and they won battle after battle after battle, small ones and major ones. And so yeah Lincoln had to rethink how slavery was going to factor into this, or emancipation was going to factor into it. Congress was a bit ahead of him though because Congress understood, as did Lincoln, but Congress especially understood how valuable enslaved labor was to the South. And so what was happening is that the Southern government, the Confederate government, was impressing enslaved men and free Black men for that matter, into their armies, not as soldiers, but as laborers; throwing up breastworks, serving as orderlies, doing things that made it possible for white soldiers to be relieved to fight. And so they were playing a tremendous role.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Black people who were left on the plantations were still growing cotton. They were still raising food for the Army. The Black population in the South was incredibly important. Lincoln recognized that, and Congress definitely did. So

as early as September of 1861, Congress is passing that first Confiscation Act that says if your property is going to be used against the Union, we're going to confiscate it, including your human property. And Lincoln doesn't like that. Remember Lincoln is a man who believes that property is sacred and you can't do that because it's against the Constitution. Well Congress does it anyway. And so from that moment, people are saying, yes, why are we not touching slavery?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

It's interesting, Frederick Douglass writes this piece where he says, "We can confiscate the flour, we can confiscate the horses, but we can't confiscate the enslaved people. What is up with this?" And so people start realizing if we're going to win this war, we have got to take that advantage from the South and make it our own. And so that's what happens over the next several months, but not before Lincoln tries to get the states to do something about slavery.

Black soldiers' influence on Lincoln

01:09:59:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think his attitude about the abilities of Black people change partially because of Douglass, but more so because of the Black soldiers who are serving after the Emancipation Proclamation. That proclamation doesn't just declare people free, it says they are also authorized to enter the Union Army and Navy. And Black men equip themselves so well in the war, Lincoln recognizes that he owes them a debt, that the nation owes them a debt.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

In fact, as early as the summer of 1863, he writes a letter to Republican friends in Illinois. And you know, he's trying to explain himself. He doesn't have time to go to Illinois to speak to them the way they want him to, but he sends this letter and he asks that the letter be read at this conference. And he says in the letter, "I know some of you are questioning why I issued the Proclamation. I issued it because it helped to save the Union." And then he says, "You say you won't fight for Black men. I say, they're willing to fight for you." And he says in the end, "The war is nearing an end. When this war is over, there will be some Black men who can hold their heads high and remember that they helped to preserve the Union, and there will be some white men who will have to hang their heads because they did just the opposite." It's a powerful letter that he writes that shows what he feels the nation owes to Black men.

The emergence of Union "contraband" policy

01:11:52:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Before the war even began, African Americans recognized that this was their opportunity for freedom. Whether you were free in the North, because there was no real freedom in the North either. I mean, Black people were not treated as equal, and part of the reason why they're involved in getting into the Army is because they know if slavery ends, it elevates their own status. So if you're in the North, you know, you have these attitudes about freedom even though no one's talking about it. At least Congress and Lincoln are not. If you're in the South and you're enslaved, you think that Lincoln is the great emancipator. That whole thing started with enslaved people who believed, before Lincoln did anything, that he was going to end slavery, because that's what they heard their owners saying.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You know. I mean, we sometimes think of enslaved people, because they were uneducated, you know, and they didn't pay any attention to what was happening politically. Oh, yes they did, and they knew what was happening sometimes before their owners did, and they knew what was happening in the world. So they had heard about Haiti, they had heard about people in other areas striking for freedom, and so when the war does come, they start leaving at every opportunity.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

What happens with Fortress Monroe in May of 1861 is just the tip of the iceberg. It's the beginning of that flight. And so you have a situation where the Union army sails into the Fortress Monroe area, Hampton Roads, and they take over the fort ... And well, General Butler comes in and takes control. So you've got three Black men showing up at the fort the next day, they're seeking asylum, and Butler questions them. Says, you know, "Why do you think you can come here and have your freedom?"

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

"Well, my owner has left the area. My owner is a military man in the Confederacy, and they're trying to take us to North Carolina to build fortifications." And Butler has a choice to make. He can either send them on their way, just let them go and fend for themselves in the city of Hampton, or he can classify them as “contraband of war” and employ them around the fort, and he decides that that's what he's going to do. He confiscates the property because they're going to be used, he thinks, to build fortifications in North Carolina.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Well, the problem is after those three men come in hoards of people come to Fortress Monroe after that– and these are infirm men who cannot serve, really can't do anything around the fort. Women who can't, children who can't. Butler has to determine, "Do I send them out of the fort or do I accept them?" And he decides to accept them all in. And they're coming from miles away, dozens of miles away. They're coming from North Carolina to the fort. So that happens, so the majority of African-American stay on the plantations and farms. They stay in the Confederacy. But at least 500,000, I've heard, actually leave the plantations and the farms and make their way to the Union lines.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Butler does try to get some kind of support from Lincoln and the administration to approve what he's doing in terms of declaring people "contraband of war," for a while there he doesn't really get any word and so he starts doing it, you know he just goes on, does it on his own and no one really challenges him in that.

01:15:54:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But the problem with the Lincoln administration early on not having a policy on that is that every Union commander now can decide what he wants to do, and so what some of them do is they take these people into the Union lines, they find- you know, they establish camps for them. Other people return them to their owners, even though the owners are in rebellion. It's the craziest thing you could imagine.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But we have to remember that not all of the Union generals are abolitionists. Many of them are not, and so- and they don't care about Black freedom, they

care about Union. They care about preserving the Union. And eventually, the Lincoln administration does decide that, yes, we're going to keep these people. But of course, Congress is already passing the First Confiscation Act in '61, and the Second Confiscation Act in July of '62, but Lincoln doesn't actually approve of either of those Confiscation Acts. He just thinks that it's a little- and it's too much like separating people from their legal property.

He's so focused on preserving the Union and he still doesn't want to do anything to upset the border states. I mean, he knows that the Confederacy, those states are lost. That they're gone. Those 11 are gone out of the Union, but he doesn't want to do anything to upset the four that are still in the Union.

The North's racist perceptions of "contrabands"

01:17:33:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Many Northeners, white Northerners, had no appreciation for what slavery was all about. What African-Americans had endured for generations, what the contraband were enduring in these contraband camps, what had happened to them on their way to freedom as they were trying to escape plantations and farms and cities, and so it was not unusual for Northern publications to publish these really ridiculous, racist caricatures of newly emancipated Black people or contraband. They thought of them as stupid, as people who were barbaric, as folk who didn't know how to behave. And so even though these people in many ways were helping the Union cause by being spies, by turning over information to the Union army about troop movements in the Confederacy, Northerners just did not appreciate the condition these folk were in and so as entertainment, as sport, they simply published these really silly, horrific images of Black people.

The Emancipation Proclamation's impact

01:19:06:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think that Lincoln comes to the conclusion that he's never going to be able to convince the border states to end slavery, and so he's going to have to do it himself. He had commanders in the field who tried to do it for him. He had Frémont, you know, in Missouri who tried to emancipate, and he said no. He had Hunter in the Department of the South trying to do the same thing, and he said no to him, but he does say that, "If emancipation is to occur, I will be the one to do it," and so perhaps certainly by that time, he was thinking along those lines.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But I think it's because he knows he's never going to be able to convince those border states to start the process of ending slavery that he has to do something himself. He has to be certain that the European nations are not going to enter the war on the side of the Confederacy, issuing a proclamation, prevents them from doing that, because their people have already decided that they want to live in a free society and they want to support free societies.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The leaders of those nations, the leaders of France and Great Britain may not be there, but their people are there. Lincoln knows that they are not going to enter the war on the side of the Confederacy as long as there is a proclamation emancipating enslaved people. The European powers would have liked to have entered the war on the side of the Confederacy because of economic ties, but they're kept out of the war for that reason.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

He also is issuing the proclamation because he recognizes that enslaved people provide an advantage to the Confederacy, so he wants to take away that advantage, he wants to throw the South into chaos, and so he's able to do that. And finally, he wants Black men in the military, because it's very difficult to keep white men in the military. People thought it was going to be a short war. So nobody wants to serve two, three years or more, and so some people are deserting and some are just getting fed up and people are getting chopped up. I mean, they are really being damaged by this war on both sides, physically.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so Lincoln needs troops, as well, and he knows that if he's issuing the proclamation, then he's got that body of men to serve because once they are freed, you know, they are coming into the Union lines, and whether they're coming in because the Union army is liberating them or if they finding their own way to the Union line. But Black men play a very important role in their own liberation and the liberation of other Black people.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so to think of Lincoln as having done it all himself just by signing a piece of paper, no, that is not the case. More than 180,000 Black men served. About 40,000 of them died. So, no, that's not a small number of people. They were there. They were there in major battles and they equipped themselves very well. Lincoln, for a long time, didn't want Black men to serve because he thought they weren't brave enough to stand up to their owners on the battlefield. Well, he was wrong. They had no problem doing that at all, and so he recognized that there was a debt that was owed to them at the end of the war.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The popular position for a long time has been that the Emancipation Proclamation did nothing, that it didn't free a single enslaved person. That's not true. You know, the argument is that Lincoln freed enslaved people where he had no authority and left them enslaved where he did have authority. And it's true, the Emancipation Proclamation only focused on those states or parts of states that were still in rebellion. Areas that were under Union control generally, those folk remained enslaved. So you've got Louisiana, you've got New Orleans and those parishes around New Orleans. Those people remained enslaved because there's a strong Union presence there. You've got southern Virginia, and Portsmouth and Norfolk and Portsmouth area. Those people remain enslaved because there's a strong Union presence there, but it doesn't mean that the proclamation was not important. The proclamation instantly freed certain groups of people because the Union army was nearby.

01:24:04:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

In other instances, people had to wait a bit, but they did eventually get their freedom. I'm reminded of an instance where an editor for a New York based newspaper, the *Anglo-African*, argued that the Emancipation Proclamation was important. He said it was like a pillar of flame beckoning slaves to the dreamed of promise of freedom. And so even if they were not in the vicinity of a Union force at the time that the proclamation was issued, they knew the proclamation existed and they did everything they could, some of them, to get to the Union lines because they wanted their freedom.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The interesting thing is though, some people would run to the Union lines, stay a few weeks, get fed up with how they were treated by the Union army

because northern white men didn't treat them much better than southern white men did. They would come back home to the plantations after they had left, mess around there a little bit, then go back to the Union lines. It is fascinating to see how people responded to the fact that they were free.

The promise of freedom in the Emancipation Proclamation

01:25:28:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Those people who say the Emancipation Proclamation was insignificant really haven't considered what's in it. What it actually says, no, it doesn't have the language that Lincoln would normally have. It's not something that we are going to quote most of the time, but it is a very powerful document. Now it is about the promise of freedom. He cannot free people without those people moving away from the plantations themselves or the Union army coming to liberate them because their owners are not going to go down to the quarters and say, "well, the president says that you're free and you can go." That is not the way it happens. But that doesn't mean that it's not important. African-Americans were leaving the plantations and farms long before Lincoln issued the Proclamation. But the proclamation is important because it tells those people that the president of the United States, the most powerful man in the country is telling you, you are free to go.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You don't have to wait. You don't have to wonder, I am giving you that promise of freedom. I always remember that the *Anglo-African* in New York, one of the newspapers in New York called the Proclamation, "a pillar of flame, beckoning, the slaves to the dreamed up promise of freedom." That is powerful. That's the way they saw it as well. And so they couldn't celebrate in

the way they would have liked to because they were still on the plantations. But the next day after hearing about the proclamation, people were packing up and leaving. And there was some areas that they could do that because there weren't many men there because they were all in the Confederate army. And so people took that opportunity to leave. The proclamation opened the door to Black freedom, and we can't overstate how important that was. So I think historians who argue that it was insignificant and that the 13th Amendment ended slavery and it did, but the proclamation opened the door and we need to give Lincoln credit for that. It doesn't matter why he did it. We know it was out of military necessity. We know he was primarily concerned with preserving the Union, but it mattered to Black people, and that's what we need to remember.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Certainly Lincoln was swayed by military necessity in issuing the Proclamation. But I think it's not fair to suggest that he had no humanitarian concerns for African-Americans. Just at the very end of it he talks about justice, you know, and he talks about- he invokes God's name. He understands how important this is to the people that he's promising freedom to. He talked before this, about, "Well, what would I do? If I could free them, would I send them all back to Africa? That wouldn't be right. Do I have them stay here? They're going to suffer." He was concerned about what would happen once people got their freedom. Certainly he was more concerned about the Union than he was about the future of African-Americans. But that doesn't mean that he didn't consider how they would be impacted by this.

Frederick Douglass' meetings with Lincoln

01:29:12:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Well, we have to remember who Frederick Douglass was. He was a person who was very much in love with himself, I think. He recognized that he was special, and he was not going to let anyone put him in a box and tell him what it was he could and could not do. So on the day of the inauguration at the inaugural ball, Douglass decides that he's going to attend even though he hasn't been invited to attend. Black people generally are not attending those kinds of things, but he's Frederick Douglass and he's going to go. So he goes, and he's not allowed in. And he sees someone that he knows and he yells to them, you know, "Tell the president that Fred Douglass is outside and is not being allowed to come in." And so this person goes to Lincoln, and Lincoln comes out and says, you know "My friend Douglass, please come in." So he asked Douglass, "What did he think of the inaugural address?" and Douglass says, "Well, Mr. President, I thought it was a sacred effort." And so you get the sense the two men are close friends, and people use that a lot, you know, these were bosom buddies. They were not. I mean, it's not like Lincoln was inviting Douglass over for a fried chicken dinner or something on Sunday, okay? But Lincoln did invite Douglass to have tea at the Soldier's Home. That was Lincoln's summer retreat just outside of Washington. Still exists. But Douglass had something else to do and he didn't accept the invitation. Of course, Lincoln was assassinated shortly thereafter.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But the two men met only three times. Once when Douglass just simply walked into the White House and demanded to see the president. The second time at Lincoln's invitation, because Lincoln was concerned that he was not going to win the election and he wanted to make sure that the Black people that he had freed by the Emancipation Proclamation could get out of the Confederacy if he was forced to ink some kind of deal with the Confederacy

that kept slavery intact. So he wanted to get as many Black people out of the South as possible, and so he asked Douglass to help him devise a plan to do that. And of course, the third time they met was at the inaugural ball.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So, I don't know that three meetings makes someone bosom buddies, but certainly, it clearly showed that the two men had respect for each other, and I think that's the most we can expect. Although, when Lincoln is assassinated, Mrs. Lincoln does give Douglass one of Lincoln's favorite canes, so obviously Lincoln had spoken highly of Douglass if Mrs. Lincoln was willing to do that.

Lincoln's personal relationships with Black people

01:32:23:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln had interesting relationships with individual African-Americans. He had Billy the barber, William Fleurville, in Springfield who cut his hair and Lincoln had assisted Fleurville in the acquisition of land. He had fairly close relationships with other individual African-Americans as well, including William Johnson. Lincoln believed that slavery damaged African-Americans socially, but intellectually as well. But he saw individuals like Johnson, like Fleurville and, of course, like Frederick Douglass that he felt were people that he could relate to. And so he remained close to Johnson for some time. I don't know that I would call any of his relationships with individual African-Americans as a friendship, but certainly a friendly acquaintance, I think, and Johnson was one of the people who fit into that category, who was very loyal to Lincoln and Lincoln was very loyal to him as well.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Well, it wasn't unusual for Lincoln to show compassion for individual African-Americans. He didn't just pay off William Johnson's part of his debts or pay for his funeral, he would see a stranger on the street who was begging, and he would be willing to give the person money. When Elizabeth Keckley came to Mrs. Lincoln to collect funds for the Freedman's society, Contraband Society, that she was so intimately involved in, of course, Mary doesn't have her own money. She's getting it from her husband, we're assuming. And so she and the president support that. I think that part of the complexity of the man is that he can see people as individuals and he can sympathize with their plight in terms of how he dealt with larger groups of African-Americans, how he dealt with the race in general. A lot of times it was based on what he saw was in the best interest of the country.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so he could be compassionate. He could believe that slavery was morally wrong. He could believe that people had the right to better themselves and that slavery prevented it. But at the same time, he could move very cautiously against ending slavery, because he said, more than once, what he did about slavery he did based on what he felt was in the best interest of the country. I think that he was always struggling with that. How much could he do without harming the country, and, of course, without treading on the constitutional right of protection of private property as well. That certainly was central to him.

Harriet Tubman

01:35:55:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Well, Harriet Tubman of course is well known for her having self emancipated in 1849. She leaves Maryland. She leaves her husband behind because he's not willing to leave with her. And, and she's not satisfied with that. She returns over and over again to bring out family members and friends at great risk to her life. She's got a bounty on her head. I mean the South is very annoyed with what she's doing, but she persists in that and she does not allow people to turn around. Yeah, apparently she even threatened them with guns if they decided that they were going to turn around. Many people don't know that she also served as a spy during the war, because this is an old Black woman who's stooped, nobody's going to assume that she's a threat to anyone. And so she's able to get into places, cross lines that the average person wouldn't be able to.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So she's gathering information for the Union army. She's called General Tubman by some people. And so the greatest feat probably is when she joined Colonel Montgomery and his soldiers in their raid up the Combahee river. And if I'm remembering correctly, they were about 700 people who are brought out of there as a consequence of that action. This is a Black woman who's doing this. She is a badass. Okay, it's simple as that. Just extraordinary and it's someone that all of our children should know about, not just Black children, she has an American spirit that we didn't see often during that period. And we see even less so now. And so she's a kind of true Patriot I think, that we need to honor and we need to remember. She was just an extraordinary person. I can't say more about her.

Elizabeth Keckley

01:38:14:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Elizabeth Keckley, who was Mary Lincoln's dressmaker and a confidant to Mary Lincoln, had been enslaved herself with her son in Southern Virginia. And she had befriended some very important people and made clothing for them, for these ladies in the South. And they actually loaned her the money to purchase her freedom and the freedom of her son. And she paid them back very quickly through her dressmaking. Elizabeth Keckley, once she was free, never forgot where she came from. She didn't try to hide in Washington and pretend that she'd always been free. This is a woman who became a pillar of the African-American community and did all that she could to help black people who were escaping slavery. And so the Contraband Relief Association was one of those ways that she attempted to assist. And so she raised money for that organization. That organization took that money to purchase fabric and already clothing for African-Americans and distributed them to "contraband" camps and bought other supplies for them.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so she's a very important part of the movement during that period to ensure that Black people who had been declared "contraband" and had found their way, or had been liberated by Union troops and brought into the city of Washington, especially, but in other areas as well, that she wanted to make sure that they were able to survive this war because lots of people died as a consequence of exposure and starvation and disease. They were in these horrific camps that were overcrowded without proper housing, without enough food, without enough clothing. And it was women, especially like Elizabeth Keckley, who raised funds to help these people. And some of these women went into the camps and administered to these folk who needed such help, who were in such dire shape.

Lincoln's complexity

01:40:50:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think first and foremost, we sort of venerate Lincoln to the extent that people still do because he did show compassion, not always in the way we would have liked him to. But he was someone who tried to be measured, who did show sympathy from time to time, always to individuals, but understood what the country was involved in at the time. So, I think that that's primarily why he's still so beloved in certain circles today. But I think we need to also recognize that as great a person as he was as a human being, he was also a flawed human being. He was not perfect. Neither should he have been. You know, he was not Jesus Christ and some people think that he was. I mean, they put him on that level.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But this was a man who was flawed. I think he probably did the best he could given the circumstances. I still don't understand, though, why he did some things. I just shake my head sometimes when I read certain things that he did that I think he could have done differently, because I know that because of some of his decisions more people died than needed to have died. When he's allowing the Union commanders to return runaways to their owners, they're going back to their deaths in some instances, or they're being sold away from their families. If he had put something in place earlier and said, "Any enslaved person who makes their way to the Union lines, they're free. Don't return them." But he didn't do that initially, and so it's those kinds of things, you know, that really do bother me.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I remember being told once by a senior faculty member when I was young and still wet behind the ears that I expected Lincoln to be something that he could not be, and perhaps I should sort of let it go and realize this is a person who did the best he could under the circumstances. I don't know that I'm there, but I have certainly a different appreciation for what he was having to deal with. Not just a war, but dissension in his own party, loss of his friends because of his stance on emancipation. So he was going through a lot. The death of his children, a wife who was frustrated in her own right because she was a woman and could not express herself in the way that men could politically, so he was dealing with a lot.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think that if you can appreciate his complexity, he becomes greater, only because you know that he's a human being like the rest of us. And despite that, I mean, he was flawed, but he found a way around some of those flaws. He was not perfect, not at all, but he was able to accomplish some things that someone who was less great or with less ambition or with less skill would not have been successful at.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so he was the right person at the right time for the nation and for African-Americans, too. I don't give him credit for everything that happened with African-Americans during this period, because we did a lot of it ourselves as well, but I do give him part. He was central to the whole thing. And so to suggest that what he did was not significant is not to understand that period of history, I think. He was important to the cause, central to the cause, but he's not the only one.

01:45:14:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So the term "Great Emancipator," for instance, not if you're suggesting by great emancipator that he single-handedly ended slavery. No, he did not. But in terms of having the courage to do what was right and what was necessary, because what he did was not just right, it was necessary to save the Union. But there's some people who would have allowed the Union to just split forever rather than do what he was willing to do, and so I think that's what makes him great.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

When I first started studying Lincoln, I looked primarily at the Lincoln Douglas debates. That's how I was introduced to Lincoln. And I remember the Charleston debate was what we would call very racist during this day because he used the N word and he said some things, other things that were not flattering to people of color. But then when I really started digging deeper into his speeches and into his private correspondence with friends and allies in the Republican party, I noticed that there was more to him than that. So I came to the conclusion that he was a very complex individual. This is someone who was Southern born, actually, born in Kentucky. He was a man of the South in many ways and he certainly was a white man of his time. But there were things that were different about him, I think. He certainly could see beyond what the average white American could see in terms of the ability of people to make themselves better. And so I came to appreciate that complexity more and more as I read more of what he had actually said.

Initially I thought that he moved extremely slowly, at a snail's pace. After having studied him longer for years and years, there are things I would've liked that he could have changed that he didn't. I think he spent too much time trying to get the border states to emancipate. I think he put too much effort into trying to protect the property of people who had rebelled against the nation.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

We're not talking about American citizens who are behaving like American citizens, we're talking about people who are in open rebellion who are killing northern soldiers and sailors, and he still had compassion for them. I couldn't have done that. I don't know that I would want anyone to do that. I just think that he was a little bit too magnanimous to people who were causing the problem. So I think that's where I'm stuck. Why would he do that?

Suffering shapes Lincoln

01:48:27:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

We certainly know that Lincoln recognizes the damage done by the war to the soldiers, to the "contraband," to the country in general. Lincoln is spending his summers out at the Soldiers' Home, it's called it's just outside of Washington. I mean, it's a part of Washington now, but it was in an area where it was cooler during the summer months, Washington was built on a swamp. So it was difficult to be in the center of the city during the summer. So he moved the white house out to, well, we moved out to soldiers home and actually traveled into the city every day. But while in residence at the soldier's home, he would have seen daily burials. There was a national cemetery adjacent to the Soldiers' Home, and he would have seen bodies being brought in. He understood what the war was doing to the soldiers. He understood what it was doing to the country, that certainly weighed on his mind. And we know that it did because the war itself, all of the pressures of being a leader during this horrific war, and it's not just a war, it's a civil war. So he understood what it was doing to Southern families as well.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Certainly we see the evidence of how he's affected in his face, because if we look at- if we see how he looked in 1861, and then how he looks in 1865. It's an extraordinary transformation. So it's definitely weighing heavily on his mind, the extent to which he became more empathetic to African-Americans. I don't know, but he certainly would have had a lot of people convincing him that he needed to think more deeply about African-Americans. Frederick Douglass would, would have been one of them. Charles Sumner certainly would have been another. Black people were coming to the white house during the war, especially when he was talking about issuing the proclamation between September of 1862 and January 1st, 1863.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

There were people coming to the white house on one side saying, don't do it. You know, it's not good for the country, but others saying, this is absolutely what you need to do, not just to save the country, but to make the country live up to the principles upon which it was founded. And so I have no doubt is very much influenced by that. He's influenced by the “contraband” that he sees in Washington on a daily basis, when he's coming from the Soldier's Home to the white house, he's passing down seventh street and he's passing one of those “contraband” camps and they are greeting him as he goes by. So he sees that firsthand. So I would suspect that, yes, he's very much influenced by all of that.

Freedom vs. equality

01:51:50:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

African-Americans saw very differently the two areas, freedom versus equality. Lincoln, certainly, initially, and most white Americans, saw freedom

as meaning the absence of slavery. Black people saw it as the stepping stone to equality. And they weren't willing to wait a hundred years to get it. They wanted it immediately.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And historians have often said, Black people wanted their own land because that's the measure of wealth when you are a rural people. It's how much land you're owning, and how much you can take care of your families with that land. The other was an education, because they were denied literacy as enslaved people. And the third was political rights. And what normally happens is, historians have had a tendency to say, well, political rights were at the top. No, it was not.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

We think it was political rights because the men and women who are writing during this period, in many respects, are folk who want political rights. And so we assume that that was the main thing. Black people want land first. They want independence. They have been under the thumb of white men and women for generations and generations. They want the freedom, the independence that comes with land ownership.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Literacy I count as second. Because they understand that if they cannot read, they cannot protect that freedom that they have. And the third is political rights. They understand that they should have the ability to govern just as white men are. But they definitely see freedom as very different.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I always have believed that it is Black men and women who really teach Americans about what freedom truly is. Freedom was simply a word, you

know, in America's founding documents before Black people put meaning to it. So they wanted the ability to reestablish their own families, to get married legally. A lot of that is happening at the end of the war because these people did not have legal marriages. They were not allowed to have legal marriages.

The education, the land ownership, the sense of community that is established through a church. So religion was extremely important to them, because that's how they learn to be leaders in these kinds of associations, benevolent societies. All of these things, that's what freedom meant to them. That is not what it meant to the average white man and woman.

Black women activists

01:54:57:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Harper was among several women, actually, who were very strong supporters of the Union cause, yes, but Black freedom first and foremost. The Union was second. I mean, most Black men and women are looking at how preservation of the Union is going to support their desire for freedom. And Frances Harper was one of those women. You also have, and she had, you know, the ability to write. And did. And so she was important because of her ability to express her opinions.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You had other women, like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, who were not writers, who were not literate, but in their own efforts, they did things. So you had Harriet Tubman, who, during slavery, had liberated quite a few people from slavery, from Maryland, primarily. But in the war effort itself, Harriet Tubman was going to the south, incognito. She led Colonel

Montgomery's force up the Combahee River in South Carolina, where she helped deliberate several hundred people.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So they're doing those kinds of things. You've got Sojourner Truth, who's really campaigning for this to be a war for liberation of Black people. You've got Charlotte Forten, while the war is going on, going to South Carolina to the Sea Islands, to Port Royal, and actually helping to make the transition from slavery to freedom. Because the Union army had occupied that area early on.

So Black women may not have been serving as soldiers, although a few did. But for the most part, Black women are doing things that are very supportive of the Union cause, including women like Elizabeth Keckley, who's in Washington, actually trying to collect money for the contraband cause. So those women are extremely important.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You've got Mary Elizabeth Bowser, for God's sake. Who's in Richmond, in the Confederate White House, spying on Jefferson Davis. She's a woman who had been enslaved, but had been freed. And when the war came, her former owner asked her to come back and installed her in the Confederate White House as a spy.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So this is a woman, you know, who was loyal to the Union, and she has her formerly enslaved woman come back and help with this cause. So Black women are active during the Antebellum Period in the abolitionist movement, but also during the war itself. And even after the war is over, when Black men and women are pressing for equality, they're there, Black women are right there side-by-side with men, trying to get the job done.

Citizenship

01:58:17:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

African Americans, more than anything else other than reuniting their families and having economic independence from white Americans, wanted full fledged citizenship. That didn't mean- freedom was not enough for them. Just for slavery to be absent in their lives was not enough. They equated freedom with having the same rights as any American man or woman and that meant having control over your children, being able to determine what was going to happen to your family, freedom of movement, education, land more than anything else, political rights, having a voice in your government, and being able to establish and control your own institutions.

Black Union soldiers

01:59:23:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The Lincoln administration and Northerners in general, white Northerners in general, did not think that Black men were brave enough, courageous enough to stand up against their former owners on the battlefield. Lincoln even said that “if you turn over our guns to these people, they're going to be in the hands of the Confederacy within a few days. So no, we cannot enlist them into the army.” Of course he was not doing it as well, because he didn't want to antagonize the border States with that. But once Black men were allowed in as officially recognized, you know, regularly organized and that's as a consequence of the emancipation proclamation, they had been serving before, but these are in volunteer units in late 1862, but with 1863 and the

emancipation proclamation, Lincoln is inviting them to come into the army. And these men serve admirably.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You've got someone like a Frederick Douglass, who's recruiting them. You've gotten Maryann Shad Carey who had been born in Delaware. And she goes to Canada and she establishes a newspaper. She comes back home during the war to recruit Black men for the Union army. They join, they have to deal with such horrific circumstances. They are given broken down equipment and broken down horses. They are put on fatigue duty. They are not treated and like soldiers. They are punished as if they're still enslaved. They don't get equal pay. And these men go on strike. Some of them stack arms and refuse to serve until they get equal pay. And some of their leaders are executed as a consequence. So these Black men who are risking their lives are not being treated as soldiers, but when they go into battle, they respond to the threat in a way that no one can challenge. And so an example of that is the 54th at Fort Wagner.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Those men are facing tremendous odds. There are many, many more Confederate soldiers that are manning that Fort and these Black soldiers have to storm it and against great odds. They do it anyway. Many of them die, but they still made the effort. And that's the important thing to remember. And they do it over and over again. They do it at Milliken's Bend at Port Hudson. They do it at New Market. There are, I believe 24 congressional medals that are given. It is extraordinary. The level of support they give to the Union Army and the Union generals are reporting back to Lincoln, that if the Union army has made the advances that it had hoped to make, a lot of that has to do with the inclusion of these Black soldiers, that they are making a difference.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Black men who are serving in the Union Army, whether they are formerly enslaved or free born are there for the same cause. Some of them, some of them are doing it because they really want to preserve the Union, but others are doing it because they want a different America. They know that until slavery ends, no one is going to advance. So Black men who were free, who are living in the North even understand that they're not going to be full fledged American citizens until slavery ends. And those men also in many instances have relatives in the Confederacy who are still enslaved. Some of these are men who had escaped years before and left families behind. And so- so they're fighting for their own freedom and equality. And they're also fighting for the freedom and equality of the people they left behind. And they're fighting for America to live up to its promise of equality for all people. Those are the true Patriots.

The Fort Pillow Massacre

02:04:00:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

African-American soldiers had a tough time in the war and not just because they were soldiers and they could be shot and killed, but because the South, the Confederacy saw them as slaves in insurrection, as they said. So it didn't matter if a Black man had been born free, if his family had been free for decades, if not centuries, it didn't matter if people had run away from slavery many years before, the Confederacy considered all Black men in Union uniform “slaves in insurrection.” And so based on that, they thought that they had the right to shoot them on site or to enslave them and sell them. Didn't matter if they were runaways or not. And so Fort pillow is an example of that idea to the extreme. You have a fort that's actually held by Black men, and

white men as well. I think we sometimes forget that Black men were not the only men who were murdered at that fort, but Black men were certainly shot down in large numbers by a group under the guidance, under the command of Nathan Bedford Forrest, who goes on to be intimately involved in the organizing of the Klan.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so that incident where Black men are attempting- where the men at the fort, the Union men at the fort are attempting to surrender and they are shot down, they're not allowed to surrender, it becomes a horrific reminder to Americans of the plight that Black men must endure who are donning the Union Blue. And so Black soldiers who remember that, they march in the battle with the battle cry, "Remember Fort Pillow", it is an incident that is very much on the minds of Americans in the North. And Frederick Douglass had talked with Lincoln about doing something about that Confederate policy, that you could not allow the Confederacy to treat men who are serving the Union so horribly. And what happens is Lincoln does issue- Lincoln does agree that for every Black soldier who is killed, a white soldier would be killed. That's not what's happening, but it certainly does give the Confederacy pause. And at the time I believe Robert E. Lee's son is being held in a Union prisoner of war camp, so it definitely gets the attention of Southerners.

General Benjamin Butler

02:07:23:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Butler is an interesting figure. A lot of historians dislike him, if historians are allowed to do that. Certainly he did the right thing when he declared those

three men who came to the Fort as “contraband of war,” and then took in the women and children as well.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But Butler, when he was in Maryland was also offering, if I'm remembering correctly, it may have been McClellan now, not Butler. But Butler was not a favorite of many in the Union during that period. But he did some things right. He certainly understood the value of the use of Black troops, as did many of the Union commanders. Initially, they may not have wanted to be assigned to a group of Black soldiers in the U.S. Colored Troops. Some actually requested it, but others did not. Others were assigned.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But you had people like Butler, who recognized the value of Black men as soldiers. I'm reminded that when, before the army was integrated and Patton was asked about what he thought about, you know, having Black men serve under him, and his comment apparently was, "I don't care what color they are, as long as they can kill those SOBs across the line." So you had people like that, who simply wanted warm bodies who could fight. Who didn't look at color first, but looked at the fighting spirit and the ability to contribute something to the war effort.

The 1864 election

02:09:27:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Things are not looking good for Lincoln, in early 1864. He really was concerned that he was going to lose that election. In fact, he was so concerned about it, he called Frederick Douglass in and asked to Douglass to

devise a plan that would help him get the people out of the Confederacy that he had freed, because he understood that if he lost the election, then the next person would be much more willing to compromise with the Confederacy. And that slavery would, you know, they would come back into the union with slavery intact. And so he wanted to make sure that those people who were considered free in the proclamation would be able to get out. Now he wins the election and that's not necessary. But at the time that he brings Douglass in, he's very concerned about whether or not he's going to win the election.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

There's so many issues in the North that are facing him. There are so many people who are against his reelection. He has not been a popular president. You know, we sometimes think because he's so revered today, everybody loved him. They did not. And had he not been assassinated, I'm not so sure that he would be seen as our greatest president today. I think that had something to do with elevating his stature too, strangely enough. But I think he legitimately was concerned about not winning, but he does win. First of all, I think because the soldiers understood that the cause was just because enough Northerners understood that he had led them to this point and the war was turning around too.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So the Union was beginning to win some battles. So they were seeing the possibility that the war could end with the Union being victorious. The soldiers helped tremendously. You had people like Frederick Douglass however who were still trashing him. I mean, Lincoln brings Douglass in and tells him, you know, “I may lose this election, so I need your help.” But it's in part too, to let Douglass know, you need to quiet things down a bit. You need to stop criticizing me so much because you might have someone in the

presidency who you're going to like even less. So it is a big deal that he wins in 1864.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln had no confidence that he would be reelected. He understood that many people did not approve of how he was prosecuting the war. They were upset about his denial of civil liberties to people. He was having people locked up who were telling the population that they shouldn't join the Union Army. His administration was concerned about people who were speaking out against the government. They were especially upset, the North was especially upset over the Emancipation Proclamation. Many Americans did not agree with that executive order by Lincoln, that presidential decree. Many of them told him he needed to rescind it, that the war would drag on because Southerners would never forgive him for what he had done there. And Lincoln always said that he had made a promise and the promise, having been made, must be kept. And he also felt that he owed something to the African American soldier. By this time, Black men were serving in significant numbers in the Union Army and Navy, and Lincoln was hearing from his generals in the field that they were really making a difference.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so he understood that the country owed a debt to these soldiers. In fact, he writes a letter to a friend in Illinois, as early as August of 1863, where he's telling them, "You say that you won't fight for Negro freedom, well it looks like they're willing to fight for you." And the statement that he makes at the very end of that letter is so extraordinary because he says to them, "The war will be over soon and at the end of this war, there will be some Black men who will be able to hold their heads high and remember that they had helped to preserve the Union, and there will be some white men who will have to hang their heads because they will have to remember that their actions tried

to hinder it." So he certainly understood that he owed a debt to African Americans, but he wasn't certain if he was going to win that election and it's extraordinary that he did, and he got the support in large measure from the soldiers.

02:14:43:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So even though these were people whose lives were being endangered, they recognized that the cause was just and this is a cause that's not just about Union now. It's also about freedom for enslaved people and that is truly an extraordinary outcome.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

McClellan had always been a problem for Lincoln because, first of all, he thought so much of himself and his abilities, but he was never able to move forward in terms of really executing the way that Lincoln felt that he should have. McClellan was just the opposite of Lincoln in many ways. Certainly had no regard for the freedom of African Americans. He certainly would not have considered slavery a moral issue and was willing to support the South.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

It was not unusual that McClellan would oppose Lincoln as the democratic candidate. He certainly represented the interest of democrats in the North and to a large extent in the South as well. By the time, of course, he's running against Lincoln, he has been removed from the Union command because Lincoln had become so very frustrated with him. McClellan never seemed to want to move forward. Even when he won a battle, he was not willing to use that to take the next step and at least in terms of warfare, Lincoln was not willing to wait. He felt that it was not time to be cautious. He had spent the first couple of years trying to convince the South to come back to the Union

so that the war could end, but once he realized that that was not going to happen, he was more than willing to push the war forward in whatever way was necessary and McClellan was never willing to follow his directions in that regard. And so the two men had very different views of how the war should be prosecuted, but also what America should look like.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

It was a difference in terms of what America's future should be. McClellan was willing to see America reunited, with slavery intact. Lincoln was not. At least by 1864, he certainly was not because he knew that slavery was central to what the issues were in the country and he knew that if it remained, then even if there was a compromise, the issue would come up sometime in the future over and over again.

Lincoln's second inaugural address

02:17:49:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Oh gosh, the second inaugural address. With malice toward none, with charity for all. It says it all. It really does. The fact that somebody could actually think that after those bloody years of war when over 700,000 people were killed. You know, we've upped the number. It used to be 620,000. It's now, we estimate, over 700,000 people were killed.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

But he still had this feeling that the country was responsible for slavery, and it was God's retribution, the war was. God brought the war because America had allowed this to happen. And so he saw the North as being just as guilty as the South. And so the war is over, or it's about to be over, and he's saying we

have to come together. We cannot blame one more than the other, and we have to take care of those people who fought on both sides. That's magnanimous. I couldn't have done it, but he was a bigger man than me, I guess. But those words, I think are so powerful. A lot of people think that the Gettysburg Address is great. It doesn't compare with the second inaugural address, and especially that ending.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln's second inaugural address is to me the most important speech he ever gave. I know everyone's in love with the Gettysburg Address because it was short and sweet and to the point, but Lincoln's second inaugural address spoke volumes about what he felt about the country's responsibility for slavery. The country's responsibility, not just the South's responsibility. So he's saying God brought this war to America, because America had failed in its purpose and so, as a consequence, the nation was paying the price. I wouldn't see that as any kind of indication that Lincoln believed that Black people should have reparations for the generations, for the centuries of slavery. He was talking in that address about America's responsibility and that you don't just blame one part of the nation for that.

Defining freedom

02:20:40:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Enslaved people, whether they had experience, you don't have to experience freedom to know what freedom is. You can be enslaved and understand what freedom is. And so enslaved people and free born Black people understood that America could be a different place, that it could be a better place. Lincoln talked about moving toward a more perfect union, understanding that the

country would never be perfect, but that we should always be moving in that direction. And so I think enslaved people and free born African-Americans understood that better than the average white Americans who had never been enslaved. And so if you've never lost your freedom, if you are in a situation where you never had your freedom, you know, it's very different. And so people who had been born free in America, who were white, who had always had privilege, could not possibly understand what freedom really meant to a group of people who had never had it. So if we talk about America being this special place, it was African-Americans who defined what that was. It was African-Americans who defined what freedom really should mean in a country that was founded on those principles.

Lincoln refused to go backward

02:22:22:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln, being able to resist those who suggested to him, pressured him even to renege on the proclamation, to rescind it, suggests that he was a very principled person, but also that he understood what the issue was that was dividing the nation. And even more than humanitarian concerns, Lincoln was about fixing the nation once and for all. And so he truly believed that slavery was at the crux of the problems that divided the country. And so, no, he was not willing to give that up. To rescind the proclamation would not have resolved the problems that the nation faced, and he understood that. It was a big gamble, but he was willing to take it.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Certainly Lincoln believed that a debt was owed to Black soldiers, but I think more than that was the belief that you can only fix the nation by getting rid of slavery.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think it would have been difficult for him to just simply rescind the proclamation after what Black men had done to help the Union. But if he saw it as a possibility to bring the nation back together and to strengthen it, he would have been willing to do that. But certainly by this point, there was no way that he was going to do that. He understood what had to be done. There was only one solution left that would really make sure that the nation would not have problems down the line. And that would be to hold fast to the Proclamation and to eventually push the constitutional amendment as well.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So, the two had to go hand in hand, the proclamation by itself would not have been sufficient because first of all, not everybody was touched by the Proclamation. There were 830,000 people who were not included in the proclamation. Some of them got their freedom as a consequence of Missouri and Maryland ending slavery before the constitutional amendment was ratified. Maryland, even before the constitutional amendment...the bill was passed by the house, but Lincoln understood that you had to have that constitutional amendment that would not just end slavery, but would outlaw if forever.

Lincoln's process in understanding the need for the 13th Amendment

02:25:03:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

We need to be reminded that Lincoln was not very active in the initial push for the 13th Amendment. In fact, he was quite silent during the early period when it was going through the Senate and it passed the Senate without major problems. It got stuck in the House. It failed the first time in the House of Representatives, and Lincoln was not much involved in that. But by the summer of 1864, Lincoln was ready to push it. I don't know that it's a consequence of any great moral epiphany or not. I think the moral thing was always there.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I have never doubted that he hated slavery, it's just that he was willing to allow it to last longer than the average African-American was willing to allow it to last, but I think that Lincoln recognized that a constitutional amendment was necessary. He knew when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation that that wasn't the end of slavery. All it did was it freed those people who were in the states still in rebellion. There was nothing that prevented former owners from re-enslaving people or establishing the institution all over again with a new set of people.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

He understood that, and I think eventually he came to the realization that the only way you ensure that slavery is never going to be a factor in American life again is to have a constitutional amendment ratified, and so in 1864, he's pushing it. And he's doing it, you know, at the convention. He wants to make sure that that's a part of the platform. He's doing everything he can to have it ratified even before the new Congress comes in after the election. He wasn't even sure he was going to be reelected, and there were people who agreed with him that he probably wouldn't be reelected, but he wanted that amendment ratified. But I think it's because he realized that the country couldn't go through another war like that, and that as long as slavery existed,

there was going to be that division, and so you take that away by ratifying this constitutional amendment.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

People have always wondered why couldn't he wait? You know, even though he had won the election, why couldn't he wait until the new Congress came in and then just go on and push that through? I mean, he had- he pretty much ... Well, he had the votes eventually after all kinds of things to get him there, but it was almost a kind of impatience to get it done and to get it done quickly. I don't know if it was because he was afraid that someone else would come in and take his place and not be as committed, or if he had premonitions of his own death. Who knows? You know, he just may have realized that the end for him was close at hand and he wanted to do this last thing for the nation. It could have been as simple as that.

The 13th Amendment

02:28:47:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

You have to have a constitutional amendment because the Southern states or any other state could have reestablished slavery without the amendment. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was a military measure that no doubt would have been challenged in the courts once the war was over. And so those folk who were included in the proclamation, who had been able to get away to the Union lines would have been okay, but the people still left in the Confederacy would have had a problem. And the States could have simply re-instituted slavery after that. So the 13th amendment was absolutely critical.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln was very silent on the issue of a constitutional amendment before the National Union Party Convention. A constitutional amendment was included in their platform. And apparently Lincoln had a role in making sure that that occurred. It's only after that convention is over and after he wins the election that he really pushes, you know, puts his full weight behind trying to get that amendment passed in the House of Representatives.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And apparently he does do some horse trading as all good politicians do. We sometimes forget that Lincoln was a great politician. He was not some country bumpkin who didn't know what he was doing. He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew who to go to, who to try to pressure to support the amendment. He knew who to offer and what to offer to people to get their support. It has been alleged that some of what was done in his name might have been illegal or extra legal or unethical or whatever. It wouldn't be the first time that a politician did that. So we shouldn't be surprised if that happened. We probably will never know the extent to which illegal things occurred or unethical things occurred that perhaps should not have been, but certainly Lincoln leaned on people that he knew would be able to push this amendment across the line.

Lincoln's long road to the 13th amendment

02:31:26:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

When he first came to the White House, Lincoln really felt that he shouldn't touch slavery and he didn't believe he had the constitutional authority to do that, and he said he had no intention of doing that. He simply wanted to

preserve the Union. He wanted the South to come back into the Union, so he was very conciliatory to Southerners. And in fact, fairly early on, though, he came to the conclusion that because slavery was the issue, it wasn't about States' rights, it wasn't about Southerners thinking that they were somehow being colonized by the United States and that they didn't have the same rights as other people did, it was about slavery and its expansion. Specifically its expansion.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so once he really understood that the issue was going to remain as long as slavery did, he started pressuring... Perhaps that's too strong a word, encouraging the southern states, the border states, Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri, those four slave holding states that had remained in the Union while their sister slave holding states joined the Confederacy. He tried to convince those four that if they started to end slavery on their own, then the Confederacy would understand that it would never get any larger and they might come to their senses and return to the Union. But the slave holding states, those border States never did. They never attempted to end slavery themselves, at least not at that point in time.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so Lincoln realized by the summer of 1862, that he would have to do something himself. Now, Congress is already doing its part. They're passing the first and second Confiscation Act. The first one in 1861, the second one in the summer of 1862, and generals, Union generals in the field, are trying to do their part and Lincoln is saying, no. He's vetoing what they're attempting to do, because what they're doing is trying to free enslaved people in certain areas of the South that are now under Union occupation.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So Lincoln decides that he's going to have to do something. He finds this, he understands that the constitution allows him, in a time of war, to do what is necessary. If it's a rebellion, he can do whatever is necessary as commander-in-chief to quell the revolt and that includes confiscating or destroying property. And so he decides that because enslaved laborers are so critical to what the Confederacy is doing, because they're still growing food, they're still growing the cotton, they're throwing up breastworks and other fortifications for the Confederacy, not because they want to, because this is what they're doing because they're enslaved people, they're being told they have to do this and in fact, the Confederate Government requires planters to do this and the Southern planters are not pleased with this. So speak of states' rights, certainly the national government and the Confederacy all of a sudden believed that it should have the authority over these people's property, so that's something we really need to think about.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So Lincoln decided that he did have the authority to issue this proclamation under military necessity, not for any kind of moral reasons, not for any humanitarian concerns, but out of military necessity. And that is how the Emancipation Proclamation comes about. And of course by 1864, by the time of the National Union Convention because this is a party, National Union Party Convention, because this is what the Republican Party is calling itself by that time – it's a combination of these different groups. So by that time, Lincoln realizes that a constitutional amendment is necessary. The Senate has already done so, has already passed that measure. The House of Representatives has not done so yet and after the election, Lincoln throws his whole weight behind it. But before the election, he was very concerned that he would not win reelection and I think he was a little cautious about the constitutional amendment because of that.

Lincoln and Black suffrage

02:36:36:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln is beginning to get there at end of his life. Because three days before he was assassinated, he does talk about extending voting rights to the more educated– I've always hated that: “the more educated.” Nobody is checking to see if white men are educated before they're given the right to vote. But Black men have to be educated. I know what he's talking about is those mulattoes in New Orleans who had property, and education, and standing in the community that was sometimes greater than their white neighbors. And they're writing to Lincoln saying "We want our rights too." So I understand what he was doing there.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The other category of people he wants to extend voting rights to are the veterans of the Civil War, Black veterans of the Civil War, because he believes a debt is owed to them. But I would hope that eventually he would have come to the conclusion that all Black people should have the same voting rights as any white man, who might not have spent a day in school. Might not have been able to read or write, in fact, many of them had to use their X because they couldn't sign their own names. So hopefully he was moving in that direction. He seemed to be moving in that direction, but we'll never know.

Land ownership is critical to freedom

02:38:14:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

People are sort of turned out on the land because- in the Sea Islands and in those areas between South Carolina and Northern Florida, Southern South Carolina and Northern Florida, they are turned out because when the Union Army arrives fairly early on by November of 1861 and occupy some of that area, the white planters flee, leaving behind large numbers of enslaved people. And so they are gathered up into camps, initially, but what happens is some right-minded people see this as an opportunity to create an experiment or to create a model situation that will help African Americans make the transition from slavery to freedom. And so by the time that you've got these people who are left out on the land, the government is having a very difficult time taking care of themselves. When Sherman comes through, you have an even greater situation because Black people start following his army. They are trying to find work. They're trying to find some way to feed their families, so they are following Sherman as he makes his march to the sea.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Sherman, who was not someone who was fond of African-Americans, and that's giving him more credit even than he deserves, wanted to find a way to get rid of them and so what he does is he does issue Special Order #15. He's allowed to do this, of course. Lincoln gives him this authority. He actually sets aside lands that have been abandoned between Southern South Carolina and Northern Florida, and the land is set back 30 miles, I believe from, from the water and all of that land is to be used by African Americans. They are able to settle that area. They're able to work the land. If they stay on the land for three years, then they are in a position to possess it. And so the 40 acres is the amount of land that is given to each family. The mule comes in because the Army gives some of these families old, broken down draft animals that the army can no longer use and the assumption is, of course, you're going to

need at least one of those draft animals to actually cultivate 40 acres of land anyway.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So the "40 acres and a mule" was what African-Americans saw as the promise to them from this land that had been confiscated, by Southerners who had fled the area and who hadn't paid their taxes. Remember, Lincoln and his administration see the South as still in the Union, so they're supposed to continue to be paying taxes like other Americans are. And so they're not paying taxes on the land, the land is confiscated and handed over to Black people who have possessory title to the land. They don't have permanent title yet, but they expect to get that in a few years. Lincoln, of course, is assassinated. Andrew Johnson comes in, who has no respect or concern or humanitarian sympathy for African Americans at all, and he returns that land to the people who had waged war against the U.S. government. Black people are absolutely devastated by this because they think of it as their land. They had been cultivating that land, not just during the war, but of course, before the war even occurred for decades.

02:42:37:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so when we look at the issue of African American wealth or the struggles, the challenges that some African Americans face today, we can look back at those kinds of things that the U.S. government did that didn't help African-Americans make that transition. The land ownership would have been critical to the ability of African-Americans to succeed as individuals and as communities, and the government did not support that redistribution.

If the South had won the Civil War

02:43:23:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Okay. To consider what would have happened had the South won the war is counterfactual, actually, and historians don't like to engage in that kind of thought. But what the heck, let's think about it. If the South had won, slavery could have lasted into the 20th century. Historians used to say that slavery was dying out because if you can't expand the institution into new territory where the land still has some kind of potency, still has nutrients in the soil, then slavery cannot last. But we need to understand that slavery was not just an economic institution. It was an institution for social control as well.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so as long as southerners wanted to control the African-American population, they would have kept slavery in place. And we see that happening after the Civil War. They do everything they can to keep African-Americans under their thumb, including not allowing them to progress because they didn't want to sell them land, they didn't want them educated, they certainly didn't want them involved in politics. And so there's no reason to assume that slavery would not have gone into the 20th century, at least.

The role of the Confederacy in ending slavery

02:44:58:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

It's interesting that there's been a debate for so long about who was responsible for freeing enslaved people. Was it Lincoln? Was it enslaved people themselves? Was it the efforts of the abolitionists? My argument has

always been the Confederacy needs a little bit of that credit as well, because if they hadn't formed, if they had trusted Lincoln when he said he was not going to touch their favorite institution, slavery probably would have continued. So as much as anything else, they were responsible for ending the institution that they cherished.

Confederate sympathizers and Lincoln's assassination

02:45:46:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

We must remember that, even in Washington, the capital of the Union, and in the north in general, there were people who were southern sympathizers. And who hated Lincoln. An example of that, of course is as he's coming through Maryland, and the death threats that he's getting. These, I mean, Maryland would have seceded from the Union if Lincoln had not sort of had it occupied.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I mean, he sort of stopped that immediately because he didn't want a situation where the capitol of the nation was surrounded by Confederate states. And so he didn't allow Maryland to secede. But there were many Union sympathizers in Maryland, in Baltimore, in Southern Maryland, wherever.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

John Wilkes booth and the assassination that occurs after Lincoln's second inauguration, his second term– it supposedly was brought on by the fact that Lincoln, three days before, had talked about Black voting rights for some men. But Booth had initially planned to kidnap him, not to kill him. But after he

heard the speech, and supposedly he was in the audience when the speech was given, he said, using a terrible word that will not be mentioned here, he said, “N word rights … we'll have to kill him for that.”

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So- but Booth was a Southern sympathizer long before Lincoln said those words. The fact that someone as well known as John Wilkes Booth, and as popular as Booth, would have actually done that, would have killed the president, shows you the strength of that southern sentiment among people who were still supposedly a part of the Union.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

There was so much that was happening in Washington itself. People were being arrested because they were spies. They were very famous women spies in D.C. who were sort of courting the generals, at least inviting them to parties and then trying to extract information from them about Union movements and so forth. And these are women who are living in Washington, who supposedly are loyal to the Union.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So this kind of thing is happening. Lincoln was vilified while he was president. You know, he probably ... No doubt a lot of his- the feelings about him, the good feelings about him, are the consequence of him having been assassinated at a time when there was so much that was at stake. At a time when he was expected to unite the country. So that opportunity was taken away from him. And I think that he's beloved because of that.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Had he survived, had he not been assassinated? He probably wouldn't be as beloved as he is today. I think that it's about, what could he have become?

What could the nation have become? Would we still be struggling with Black rights now, more than a century and a half later, had he survived? We don't know. We don't know, but it's interesting to think about.

Assassination

02:49:51:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

We have to remember that Lincoln was the first president to be assassinated. It was such an unusual situation. The fact that he was shot on Good Friday, sort of put him on the- people started thinking of him in relation to Christ and Christ's crucifixion.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The fact that he is assassinated at the very instance that he has won the war. He has gone through so much and then he doesn't even live very long to enjoy the victory. That has a major impact on people. And I think people also recognize that he was someone who truly did care about the country and did what he could to try to pull it back together. And of course the formerly enslaved also had a role to play in his deification. He becomes a great emancipator image, at least in part because of how formerly enslaved people viewed him. They saw him as their savior, as the man who was going to guarantee their freedom. And now he is snatched away from them. I think the rest of the country felt that way as well.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

It is interesting that this is an instance in American history where you've got Black people and white people able to grieve over the same thing, able to

mourn over a single individual that speaks volumes about Lincoln's role and how people viewed him.

Frederick Douglass' changing views of Lincoln

02:51:47:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Lincoln and Douglass had an interesting relationship. I know some historians like to call it a friendship. I don't call it a friendship when two people have met only three times. That's not quite what's going on there. I think they had a healthy respect for each other. Douglass initially has some concerns about Lincoln. He's not sure that Lincoln is the right candidate in 1860 for the Republican party, but he thinks there's a possibility. He trusts the party perhaps more than he trusted Lincoln. And there are many African-Americans who don't see Lincoln as the right candidate, has a Hezekiah Ford Douglas, for instance, no relation to Douglass, thinks that Lincoln is not going to be good for African-Americans. When Lincoln does win, Douglass becomes disappointed because in Lincoln's first inaugural address, he's very conciliatory to the South.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And Douglass wanted him to say something very positive about what he was going to do about slavery. Lincoln is not there yet. He's not willing to do that. In fact, he even says that he's willing to support all of the domestic institutions of the South. That includes the Fugitive Slave Act. And Douglass, and other African-Americans and abolitionists in general, are livid about that. As Lincoln continues to delay doing anything about slavery at a time when it seems like the perfect opportunity since these people have left the Union. Douglass becomes more and more upset with Lincoln and said some very

nasty things about him. It is amazing what people could get away with in those days.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so only when Lincoln issues the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation does Douglass start warming up to him. And Douglass knows by the time of the actual emancipation that's issued on January 1st, a hundred days later, he sees that not everybody is being included in the proclamation. But Douglass says Maryland cannot last long as a slave state if slavery does not exist in Virginia. And so he understands that this is an opening of the door. And so he becomes more favorable toward Lincoln. He's very much involved in trying to encourage Black men to join the Union Army. His "Men to Arms" speech is exactly that "you need to fight for your own freedom." He's very important in that respect.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Douglass goes to the White House to complain. He actually sees Lincoln three times. The first time is to complain that Black soldiers, this is after Emancipation. He goes in August of 1863 to complain that Black men, Black soldiers are not having the same rights as white men. They don't have the same pay. They don't have the same equipment. They're not being allowed to work as soldiers, initially. They're doing fatigue duty. And so Lincoln says to him, "I understand that, but we had a hard time just getting them into the army, so be patient, all of this will happen." And it does eventually, by 1864.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

The second time, in the first time that Douglass goes to the White House, it's not like he has an appointment or anything. He shows up. Lincoln finds out that he's there. And Lincoln takes him over all of these white men who are enraged that this Black man is allowed to come in to see Lincoln ahead of

them. So Lincoln appreciated the fact that Douglass was this very important figure in the African-American community and he had a platform. Douglass had his own newspaper and he was writing a lot of interesting things about Lincoln. So I think Lincoln wanted to keep him placated as well. The second time he goes to the White House, Lincoln summons him.

02:56:18:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And that's the time when Lincoln says "I may not win the election. I need you to help me devise a plan to get these people out of the South before they're caught behind enemy lines." And the third time is when Douglass uninvited goes to the White House for the inaugural reception and he's not allowed in because he's a Black man. And Lincoln finds out that he's at the door and tells them to let him come in and greets him as his friend and asked him about what he thought of the speech. And Douglass says it was a “sacred effort.”

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

And so if that's a friendship, then that's what they had. But more likely it was two people who had actually similar experiences in terms of a poor upbringing. Lincoln was never enslaved although some people suggest that might be why he was so willing to accept freedom for Black people. That he felt like he was enslaved by his father. That's another issue– I don't know about that. But I think that Lincoln appreciated the fact that Douglass was a self-made man just as Lincoln was. And so the two men did have a respect for each other, although they were adversaries as well on numerous occasions. But Mrs. Lincoln thought that Lincoln cared enough about Douglass that she gave Douglass one of Lincoln's favorite canes after Lincoln was assassinated. So no real friendship, but definitely a respect for each other.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Douglass' attitude about Lincoln changes as Lincoln changes. As Lincoln becomes more involved with Black freedom, Douglass warms up to him. But certainly in 1864, Douglass does not feel that Lincoln is doing enough. And so he starts back on the road to criticizing him, but not so much that he's not willing to consider Lincoln's request that he come up with a plan to get those folk who had been enslaved out of the South, who were touched by the Proclamation, or should have been touched by the Proclamation.

What Reconstruction may have looked like under Lincoln

02:58:58:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

There was a great deal of sorrow, sorrow on the part of African Americans, at Lincoln's assassination. Because they thought, in fact, they said that the Black man's best friend has been murdered. They really expected that he was going to protect them as they made the transition from slavery to freedom.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I'm a bit of a cynic, okay? I think, given Lincoln's desire to reunite the nation and to allow bygones to be bygones, I don't know that Black people would have advanced as rapidly under Lincoln. I know I'm, this is counterfactual. I mean, historians don't like to do this, this is ahistorical, but I'm going to do it anyway. Because it's fun to think about what would have happened. Lincoln gives us some idea of where he was going with reconstruction. And so, as early as late 1863, he's talking about what reconstruction might look like. And at that point, he's saying, you know, this is not gradual emancipation. This is immediate. It's not really good. You know, I mean, it's not good for the people who are losing their property, and it's not good for African-Americans

either. Because after all these folk have never been free before, as if you have to be free to know what freedom really is. Okay?

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

So he said that he was willing to accept a situation where the former master class and the former slave could learn to live, to establish a new relationship. And what he was talking about was something akin to apprenticeship. Not full freedom in the sense that Black people can come and go as they wish, but a situation where, perhaps Black people would have been working on the former plantations for their owners, they would have had to be paid for their labor and they couldn't be beaten, and that kind of thing, but it wouldn't have been something that I would see as necessarily advantageous to Black people.

That's problematic. But at the same time, he's talking about education as well. And he's saying Black people need to be educated. And he does indicate that if the new association doesn't work, if the apprenticeship doesn't work for the few years he expected it to be an existence, he would step in to make sure that things were done properly.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I would hope that would have been the case. We'll never know. But given the fact that he was tired ... I mean, historians have argued that if he hadn't been assassinated, he probably would have killed himself. Because the war definitely took its toll on him. I mean, he looks horrible at the end of the war because of the pressure. He had to deal with so much, personal and political.

And just seeing, you know, every day, the national cemeteries being filled with the bodies of soldiers who didn't survive, that had to weigh on him tremendously. But I think that the 14th and the 15th amendments were passed within that first decade of freedom because you had an incompetent president in the White House in the form of Andrew Johnson, and the radicals

in Congress, the Republicans in Congress, decided to take advantage of that incompetence and pass those measures.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Had Lincoln been there, they would not have been able to do that. And I'm not so sure that Lincoln would have been as willing to move that quickly. I think eventually he would have gotten there, but given the fact that he was always very cautious, I think it would have taken him a little bit longer.

Reevaluating Lincoln

03:03:23:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think Americans as a people like to think of themselves, ourselves, I guess, as we are in a perfect nation that never really had problems. And if we had some little issues along the way, those issues were resolved. One of the biggest issues, the issue of slavery was resolved with the sacrifice of someone who was so caring, was so humane, who cared so much about people who were enslaved. And so a nation who could create someone like an Abraham Lincoln obviously must be special, must be exceptional. And so we need not go back and deal with the issues that the country faced because they had all been resolved because this great man, you know, pulled the nation back together, got rid of slavery. And we love him for that. And so, problem solved. There's nothing else wrong with the country.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

We don't need to deal with the legacy of slavery. We don't need to deal with Jim Crow and discrimination. We don't need to deal with white supremacy and racism. Those things don't exist because Lincoln sacrificed himself. We

like to see Lincoln as the evidence that America is perfect. And so we revere him without flaws.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

W.E.B. Du Bois had written a piece for the *Crisis Magazine* in 1922, where he talked about Lincoln as a flawed character. But he says at the end, he was big enough to be inconsistent. He talks about his inconsistencies, but that even though he was inconsistent, he still was a great man. He was trashed for that. I mean he really, he had to go back and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry. You know, I know you think Lincoln's perfect. I wasn't trying to say that he was a bad guy." But that's the attitude that people have.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I remember doing a television program years and years ago, probably, well in the nineties actually, where I was just talking in general about some of the complexities. And I had a British lady who described herself as such write to me and say, “how dare you say these things about Mr. Lincoln, he freed your people. So you should be grateful.” And I thought, wow, you know, what did I say that would have offended her? But people don't like to hear any criticism of Lincoln at all. And I think we do a disservice to him when we see him as this perfect figure who was up there at the same level as Christ. That's not who he was. That's not what he claimed to be. And I think he would be terribly offended that people saw him that way.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I think the importance of Lincoln as is the importance of any historical figure is for us to understand exactly who they were in all of their complexity. I think we do them a disservice when we say they're one thing or the other, these are human beings. These are not stick figures. These are not people who just live in a vacuum. These are people who have their own issues, their

own prejudices. It's important, especially to understand Lincoln and how he evolved because Lincoln was a man of the South. He was a man of the 19th century. He was a man who brought certain prejudices to whatever he was doing, but he was a man who could overcome some of those things long enough to do the right thing. And I think he becomes so much more important to the nation as a symbol of what the nation can be and can do. When we look at him that way.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

If we just said, this is a perfect individual, well, we can then just write him off and say, well, you know, this is a fluke. But if we see him as someone who was as complex as he was; who had these issues, who was torn obviously between doing the moral thing and doing what he saw was right at the time for the country. He was able to do both. He was able, however he did it, and there is argument about how he did, he was able to save the nation and help get rid of slavery in the country. And to me, that is what's really important about him. That's why I've been interested in him for so many years. Not because he was the perfect Lincoln, but because he wasn't.

Memorials to Lincoln

03:08:36:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

I always liked the little statues of Lincoln with his son or just sitting there. There's one with, I think there's one with Kermit the Frog. It's the normal Lincoln, every day guy. That's the person that most people could relate to. And I think we do need to view that more than we do. The Lincoln Memorial is extremely important. It's important because it's a symbol for the nation of equality of opportunity, of everybody having a chance to better themselves.

And it's a place, a rallying place, for all of these groups that are trying to finish the work that Lincoln had started and the nation had started during that period. So it's very important, but these other little statues all over the country are important as well. And so I hope that we spend some time enjoying them and really seeing what they're trying to say about the average man who's out there just trying to live.

The art of Edmonia Lewis

03:09:43:00

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

Edmonia Lewis was a very interesting historical figure. We're not sure completely about her background. She certainly identified herself as a woman that was just not of African descent, but of Native American descent as well. And certainly her appearance would suggest that that might be the case and it would not have been strange at all for her to have had that kind of background. What's important about her is that she shows that Black people, during the time of great struggle, can do extraordinary things. This is a woman who was born free, but she ... and she had certain advantages, but she's able to create art that is truly extraordinary. And a lot of that art is geared toward helping people see the greater complexity of African-Americans.

EDNA GREENE MEDFORD:

It was so easy during that time to focus just on negative images, or to talk in great deal about slavery and the damage done as a consequence of slavery. Her work however, is beautiful and it does help us understand the lengths that Black people could achieve, what they could achieve if allowed to do that.

She received national acclaim. One of her pieces, *Forever Free*, is in the collection at Howard University. And it's one of our most treasured pieces.

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