KERRI GREENIDGE
LINCOLN'S DILEMMA
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Kerri Greenidge Interview
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Interviewed by Jackie Olive & Barak Goodman
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CREW MEMBER:

Ms. Kerri Greenidge interview, take one, marker.

Using "enslaved" people as opposed to "slave"

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So the reason why using the term enslaved as opposed to slave is not just semantics, is that the term enslavement really puts the onus on the institution of enslavement itself, as opposed to categorizing the human beings that were enslaved. So, for instance, when you say somebody was a slave you're reducing them to the categories that the Atlantic World attempted to put them in, which was to be objects and to be denied any sense of humanity. So enslavement is a condition. It's not the person who was actually enslaved.

Portrayals of enslavement in America

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So one of the things we know is that African-Americans, while a majority of African-Americans are descended from enslaved people, slavery itself was a long institution on North America.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

That means that there's approximately more than 200 years of enslavement on North American soil. It means that enslavement as a category differed over space and time. It differed whether you were from Massachusetts versus whether you were from South Carolina versus whether you were enslaved previously in the Caribbean and then made your way to North America. So one of the things that, as historians, we try to do is provide for that nuance.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And providing for that nuance is pointing out that because enslavement existed over a long period of time, it doesn't mean that all African-Americans are defined by what we suppose slavery looked like from movies and TVs, most of which captures slavery from the 1850s, as opposed to kind of this long trajectory that exists in the United States.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So one of the ways in which the humanity enslaved people is portrayed, is it's often not portrayed as if these are people and actors who would have any response as any human being would have to a system in which they were being exploited. So you have all different way of stories. There's all different ways of imagining and depicting and looking at the ways that people would react to enslavement. And so I often tell students that one of the ways we can do this is think of how the millions of ways in which human beings react to their situations. That's the way that enslaved people reacted to their situations, depending on what situation they were in, depending on their ties to family. We often sort of look at people as existing in a vacuum and as individuals, but enslaved people were human beings who had families. They

had kin, they had people they cared about, people they disliked, people who they loved, people who they quarreled with. And so if we put that in, then we start to get more of the nuances of the stories of enslaved people.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And one of the things also to point out is the narratives that we have, although they are not on nearly enough of all the enslaved people in North America. When we look at slave narratives and what it was that enslaved people were saying about their experiences, that's a good place to start to get the wide array of over space and time of how African descended people were experiencing slavery.

The experiences of enslaved people

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

One of the things we know about enslavement since it was an institution that existed for over 200 years, is that it looked different and people had different experiences based on the area that they were enslaved. So for instance, in a state like South Carolina, where the African-American community, the population, was larger than the white community, slavery looked a different way. We know, for instance, that South Carolina, particularly Charleston, had very strict laws governing when slaves and enslaved people and free people could be out. They had a drum that would sound in the city center in Charleston that would signal that enslaved people had to be out of the city. But then if you went to someplace like New Orleans, slavery functions slightly differently, given the mixed population that existed there and the categorizations of enslaved people. You had a contrast between the city and the plantation, so you had enslaved people who were enslaved say in

Richmond, Virginia, who had a very different experience than enslaved people who were enslaved in northern North Carolina.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so one of the things we know though, that is the commonality, is that underneath federal law and local law, enslaved people did not have a right to their person, their bodies, or to their children. And that as a enslaved person, you had no recourse or very little recourse in terms of the law and in terms of how you were treated underneath the law.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

You also were basically considered a commodity to be bought and sold. And so what that meant was that your existence was really tied to the fortunes of the white people who claim to own you as a human being. And so if enslaved people were working on a plantation where the plantation owner fell into debt, you could be sold, your children could be sold, and that would sort of depend upon the situation you were in. So, although there's a lot of nuances within enslavement, in terms of not one experience of an enslaved person encapsulating all experiences, the one thing we know in the commonality is – this is from reading slave narratives and the historical record – is lack of right to your person and to your community, and particularly for parents to your children.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

The other thing I would just say about the violence, is that particularly in slave populations where African-American people were a majority, I'm thinking of Mississippi, South Carolina, parts of Louisiana, that violence had been there since the early 1600s. And so by the time we got to the 19th century, that's really embedded in laws and embedded in custom. In

Charleston, for instance, there was a special work house where slave owners could send enslaved people to be disciplined, and you as a slave master, you would send enslaved people in there, and there are sort of these brutal stories of enslaved people and their treatment there.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

We know that there were laws on the books that supposedly protected enslaved people from certain forms of punishment, and yet we also have sort of this contradiction of enslaved people being punished in very brutal ways throughout the South. And so that violence was embedded into the system. If you are to enslave somebody, as we know, that's going to take a lot of violent will to keep somebody from escaping. And we see this from the 17th century, all the way up to the Eve of the Civil War.

The experiences of enslaved women and girls

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So, one of the things we know about enslavement is that the ways in which African American women and indeed African women throughout the diaspora, so throughout the Atlantic world, really were their bodies again, because they did not belong to enslaved people themselves. Their bodies were really up for grabs by men, white men – white men who claimed to own them, but also white men who did not own slaves, who would claim to have rights to women's bodies. W.E.B. Du Bois said that this form of sexual exploitation and rape of enslaved women meant that by the end of the civil war, one third of all African-American people in the United States were the product of some type of sexual relationship, willing and unwilling between white men and enslaved women or not enslaved Black women. And so this was pervasive across the South, we know that certain areas in the South,

particularly a place like New Orleans, in a place like Charleston, there were enslaved African women who were kept as concubines, mistresses of white men across the South, but this changed over time. So what a form of enslavement and sexual exploitation, the way it looked in 1790s, Virginia, it looked very different by the time you got to New Orleans in the 1850s.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

Harriet Jacobs, she who an enslaved woman who came out with *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, talks about the fact that this was part of a enslaved girl's life. That by the time an enslaved woman reached the age of early teens, 12 or 13, this was sort of a perilous passage in a slave girl's life is how Harriet Jacobs referred to it. And so it shows that this kind of view of African-American women and girls as being the property, the gift for white men or force of the sexual predatory nature of the society in general that was accepted at the time.

The paradox between slavery and the U.S. constitution

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

Well, it's interesting, because one of the things in terms of the paradox that people claim to see between the ideals of the American Republic in the 1770s and 1780s, and the realities of that Republic, one thing that historians have looked at is the ways in which freedom develops alongside slavery, and slavery develops alongside freedom. And this idea that you have in enlightenment, which we all think of in the 18th century, that somehow espouses rights of liberty and republican (little r) freedom, that somehow that's contradictory to slavery. In fact, it develops at the same time that you're

developing ideas of enslavement, alongside ideas of freedom. And so one of the things to look at it is that many of the founding fathers, who make these proclamations in the 1780s owned slaves. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, we know was having a relationship with an enslaved woman named Sally Hemings. And that this was common throughout the colonies as they're seeking their independence.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so one of the things to look at is not to say that it's hypocritical, but to say that, what does it mean that enslavement is so entwined in the American imagination and American politics with slavery, and that those two things develop at the same time. And that for a majority of the history of the United States, those two things have not been seen as opposite, but yet have been seen as two sides of the way that the United States function. And that until very recently, that was seen as perfectly in keeping with ideas of what it meant to be a free society.

The slave economy

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So chattel slavery, in terms of an institution, that has existed in the United States, it's important to realize that it was endemic to what the United States was made of. It was a signal part of the American economy. So one of the statistics is that by the eve of the Civil War, 60% of the American economy is dependent upon cotton. Cotton was produced by enslaved people. And 70% of the economy in Great Britain, the textile economy, came from the American South. So that gives you an idea of how economically this system was part of the United States. But it wasn't just cotton. It was the institutions that were created. And this idea that colonies, places like Massachusetts, places in the

North and in New England had enslavement going back to the 1630s. And it wasn't until the early 19th century that slavery ended.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so what that meant was that you had a whole century and a half in which slavery percolated, it changed, it altered over time, but it was still the leading economic basis for the United States as a system. And one of the things to point out is, is there a place in the United States that you can point to that was not produced, between 1650 and say 1750, from enslaved labor or the product of enslaved labor? And you'd be very sort of hard pressed to come upon something of that nature, even in a state that like Massachusetts, that proclaims that it was free. You have the land that was cleared. You have the fortunes that were made. You have the shipping industry that built up Massachusetts and New England as a maritime power. All of that is fueled in part, or if not in whole, by slavery and the slave trade.

The three-fifths compromise

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

Okay, so because the United States, the way the constitution was created, it created what was called the Three-fifths Compromise, and basically what that said was that in order to count representation in states, how many seats a state was going to have in Congress, you counted the population, but then you also counted three-fifths of all other persons, is how it was phrased. And basically what that meant was that the Southern states, because of their large slave population, three-fifths of the slave population would be counted as representative, even though those enslaved people could not vote. In the other non-slaveholding states, it went by their population. All other persons, of course by 1840, majority of Northern States did not have slave

populations. And so what that did was it skewed the Congress towards slaveholding members, because you had slaveholding states, which got extra seats based on the number of enslaved people they had, and they counted in their population.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so what this did was it created, what Charles Sumner, famous Massachusetts senator called the plantocracy. He basically meant that there was a whole class, political class within the South that had become the opposition and the majority in the Congress. And so you had things such as a Nullification Crisis, which occurred in the 1830s when South Carolina refused to obey a tariff law, all because of slavery and what that had to do with colored seamen, as they called them at the time.

The Whig Party

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

You have by the 1850s, the poll political system being based upon the conflict between political parties, the Democrats and the Whigs. And the Whig Party was a descendant of the party that was in England at the time, by the 1830s, 1840s in the United States, it was divided between those who were Whigs, and so that meant that they believed in, broadly speaking, they believed in industry, they believed in economic support by a federal government, but you had those Whigs who believed that and yet they also believed that slavery was instrumental to that.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And then you had other Whigs, mostly in New England and in the Midwest who really began to, by the 1840s, argue that slavery had to be contained.

That it was spreading into the West. It was undermining the American ability to be an industrialized competitive nature. And really, up until the Civil War, up until Secession in 1860, the Southern plantocracy was sort of the dominant party, within decisions that were made in terms of legislation, in terms of policy, in terms of what was going to be argued on the floor of the Senate and in Congress. A good example of that is that by the 1830s, there's something called the gag rule, which prevented abolitionist petitions from being read before Congress. And that was completely because the Congress was controlled by slaveholders or people who had an interest.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so to the question of how the slave interests in politics, in something like the Whig Party, influenced the North. The North really was constantly walking a compromise with what the North saw as economically, and the future of what they saw the country as, and then also having and knowing that, that depended upon alliance with the South. And so it's really a very small minority of Northerners, who even as the Civil War unfolded in 1816, 1861, it's a very small minority of Northerners who argued that slavery was untenable, that it couldn't exist. Most Northerners were really thinking of slavery as an institution that could be molded to something that would not spread into the West, but something that they were not arguing had to be completely abolished.

The birth of the Republican Party

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So by the 1850s, there's this battle going on, both in the streets of the United States, and also politically. Part of that had to do with in 1850, there was a law passed called the compromise of 1850, which admitted California and

Western States into the union. But outlawed the slave trade in D.C., enacted a very strict federal Fugitive Slave law, but also sort of had popular sovereignty for states that were coming into the United States. And so this piece of legislation was meant to be a compromise between North and the South. However, what it did was it entrenched these differences, political, cultural, and racial between the North and the South. Between those who wanted to see slavery spread into the West, and those who wanted to see industry and free labor spread into the West.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so by the early 1850s, you had a slogan that was being chanted by many Whigs who were conscious Whigs, one of them being Charles Sumner, who… their argument was free soil, free labor, free men. And basically what they meant by that was that the United States had to have a economic system in which people, and in most incarnations of this they meant white men, could work and they would be justly compensated for their labor, that it wouldn't be labor that they had to be coerced into doing. And so this became an entire ideology, particularly in the North that attracted people to what became the Free Soil Party, and then eventually morphed into what was called the Republican Party. And so people like Charles Sumner, argued that you had free soil, free labor, free men.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

But they also had this whole ideology surrounding what it meant to be a citizen. And one of the things they thought that meant was this idea of consent of the governed. The fact that as a person, you had to consent to the systems under which you lived, and that this was going to basically bring into practice what had been declared in the 1780s and 1790s in terms of republican, again, a little r, form of government.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

By 1854, this had a specific urgency, this idea because of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which basically argued or went against precedent that had existed in the country for a little over 30 years. And that precedent was that for every slave state that was admitted to the union, you had to admit a free state. And so it set up that you would have an equal number of slave holding senators and non-slave holding senators.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

And with the Kansas-Nebraska Act, this actually got rid of that proclamation. It said that now, slavery could exist wherever the popular sovereignty, or the popular vote, believed that slavery should exist. So this was terrifying, particularly for people who were from the North, because it basically set up that Southern states could theoretically send people into states as they did into Kansas, had those people vote and they could create slave states out of this territory. And so the Republican Party emerged out of that maelstrom that occurs in 1854. During this time period, though, there were many or most members of this new Republican Party who were not necessarily abolitionists. In other words, they didn't necessarily think slavery should end immediately.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

They did believe that free labor should exist in the West, but they often had no designs on ending slavery where it existed in the South. Abraham Lincoln emerged as a member of this Free Soil Party and then as a member of the Republican party. And he was very clear all the way up until secession and really up until 1862, that he did not wish to end slavery where it existed. And that slavery where it existed, he did not believe could be abolished by the federal government. As the Civil War continued, of course, that began to change due to things that were happening on the ground, but it really was

still a very radical position in early 1860s, to say that slavery itself should end, and that slavery should end and that slave owners should not be compensated for the loss of the labor of the enslaved.

Free Black and enslaved peoples influence on leaders becoming abolitionists

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

My thoughts would be, he… you have work by like Eric Foner, the great historian, and others. All evidence would point to the fact that Lincoln was somebody who was against slavery. As many people of his class and of his station in life would have been. But in terms of being an abolitionist, and by abolitionist, you mean somebody who actively worked to end the slave system, who believed that it was morally wrong, who believed that African-American people and former slaves had rights within the United States. He was not that person until the very sort of latter end of his life, the last part of his life. And so he was not a radical in terms of believing in racial equality or in even terms of believing that formerly enslaved people had certain rights, duties or part in the body politic.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

He came to that, I would argue, through his experience in the war. And so my challenge would be to historians, is to say, what would it matter if he was somebody who was strategizing and this brilliant mastermind who was like storing up to become an anti-slavery person, or whether he actually was somebody who was not involved in anti-slavery? The effect was the same. And the effect was that it really was African-American people and enslaved people themselves, pushing the boundaries through which even people who profess to be Republicans at the time considered what freedom would look like.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So the reason why I would argue that we can't either villainize Lincoln and say he did nothing for the cause of emancipation or valorize him and say that he single-handedly brought about the greatest human rights moment in the history of the United States, is because Lincoln, like most white Americans at the time, was forced to reckon with slavery and its consequences due to Black people themselves. And so one of the things that the historical record would show is that the majority of even people who became abolitionists, even someone like a John Brown, who became a very radical abolitionist, they come to that by their engagement with, and talking to, and living around and conversing with African-American people themselves. And it's those people that push the boundaries of what it is that white people in America think of as slavery and freedom. And so if we look at Lincoln in that context, that he was a white man who was brilliant in terms of the way he approached politics and his ability to negotiate.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

But that did not mean that he was somebody who was a radical in terms of rights for African-Americans. It does mean, that given what happened during the civil war, the fact that as early as 1861, you have African-American people fleeing and joining places where the Union army was stationed. That's a problem in real-time on the ground that somebody needed to respond to. He as the executive of the United States had to respond to that.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And even with that, we know that his response initially was not something of immediate emancipation. His response was looking at it as a political issue. So I would argue and challenge Americans to look at Lincoln as somebody who is like a good majority of people we tend to revere in terms of their

position on civil rights and human rights, which is that often those types of people are forced into their reckoning with a system that they want to abolish, because of the people who are most affected by that system. That doesn't just happen because somebody suddenly has this benevolent moment where they say, "I'm going to end slavery." It usually happens because they have an interaction with Black people who are pushing their boundaries. An example of this would be William Lloyd Garrison, so William Lloyd Garrison was from Newburyport, Massachusetts. He is an evangelical and a moralist in terms of religion. He says, "Slavery needs to end." But he was somebody who initially supported the American Colonization Society. He was somebody who didn't really have many thoughts on what would happen to African-Americans once they were free. And then in Boston, he meets the Black community in Boston. One of the people he reads is David Walker, who has this treatise in 1829 that talks about the need for immediate end to slavery and William Lloyd Garrison, that sort of pushes him, even though he remained non-violent, it pushes him to really reevaluate what it is that he thinks about how slavery should end.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

A similar thing happens to Charles Sumner, as he's becoming involved in the Senate and politically. Again, he becomes somebody who was very involved in the fight against segregated schools in Massachusetts and through that, ended up being more radicalized than he probably would have been before. And so, I would challenge us when we're looking at Lincoln to look at him in that way. And to use that to look at what does it mean when somebody becomes someone who is on the side of an oppressed group that is not their own. And often it would seem to indicate that they come on that way. It doesn't make it any less sincere, but it does mean that it's true. It means that

they come to that position based on the action of enslaved and disenfranchised people themselves.

The national crisis facing Lincoln as he took office

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

When Lincoln ran for president, he's running on a ticket that there were four candidates that we often forget. So he's running as a Republican, the first one to run. You also have the Democratic party, which splits. It splits between those in the South, who take sort of a hard line view of what will happen to the country and slavery, and then you had kind of these unionists in the South. And then you also have unionist Democrats in the North. So he's running against sort of these three factions. He's elected, but almost immediately when the returns start to come in that he's elected, you have this convention movement across the slaveholding South, in which legislators from South Carolina begin to go around the South to different legislators across in other slave holding states and ask those states and push those States to talk about secession.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So this happens, the first one happens, a secession meeting happens in December, 1860. He's just been elected a few weeks before. And by February, 1861, you have Southern states. The majority of them have voted to secede. And so that's a three month period where Lincoln has been elected. There's a lame duck administration that's in office from roughly November to March. And during that time, he loses basically half of the country. Half of the country claims that they are now no longer part of the country and that they are their own country called the CSA. The other thing that happens with that is that very quickly Southern states, because they consider themselves another

country, they withdraw their members from Congress. They withdraw their members from the Senate. They withdraw their members who were heads of certain courts and certain military bases in the South. That's how we get Fort Sumter.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Fort Sumter was a federal fort. And so the Southerners leave that fort, Lincoln sent in an unarmed boat to send supplies to the federal officers who were still stationed there. And that's when the Confederacy attacks. And so, he really, when he enters office, he is entering office in a moment of crisis when the country itself, there was not a lot of belief that the country would enter on the other side fully whole.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

There were people in the North who were radical abolitionists, who would have argued that the South should be allowed to secede, because this was best for the morality of the country. You had others who were saying that the South shouldn't secede, that the country would economically explode. And then you had others who were sort of like now, who were probably not particularly paying attention to what was happening until they heard about the assault on Fort Sumter.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So he's entering when the country is kind of at this moment of crisis. In terms of how he was viewed in the North, you have many people in the North who were anti-slavery, but they did not believe in the Republican party. They thought the Republican Party was allied with women's rights activists. They thought that the Republican party was allied with the rights of the Negro. This was a phrase that would happen – was put in Northern newspapers at

the time. They tended to think of the radical Republican... The party of the Republicans was much more radical than it actually was. And once Fort Sumter happens, in certain states that pulled some of those Northerners who were on the fence about their support for Lincoln, it brought them in. So someone like the General from Massachusetts, Benjamin F. Butler, who ends up becoming one of the architects behind the 'contraband' of war policy. He was a Democrat. He was somebody who, even though he was sort of ambivalent about slavery, he believed the South was right in their ability to own slaves. And once there's the assault on Fort Sumter, Benjamin Butler becomes an officer in the Union army and becomes, and transforms into a radical Republican. And so Lincoln really enters office at a time when he's not really seen, particularly if you were a radical abolitionist as somebody who is a radical abolitionist, the only people who saw him that way, were people in the South who were trying to secede, although he was a Republican and the first Republican candidate, he was not recognized as someone who was radically going to change the racial status quo of the country.

Lincoln's views on Black rights

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

There's a lot of response to Lincoln of being on the side of the rights of the Negro. There's a lot of response of him being, he's going to free the slaves. And we know that Lincoln himself, this isn't his goal at all as president. And that his goal as president, particularly in 1861, 1862, as he keeps saying, is to keep the Union together, right? And that he has that famous quote in late 1862, if I could keep the union together by freeubg none of the slaves, I would do it. If I could keep the union together by freeing all the slaves, I would do that. And if I could keep the union together by freeing some and keeping others in bondage, he would do that as well. So he's really somebody who is

not looking at slavery as an issue that is going to be the center of Union policy. Another thing about Lincoln was that he was somebody who, although politically, he did not believe in slavery spreading into the West. He had these racial views about Black people in their capacity for government, their capacity, to be part of a republic, their capacity even to survive without sort of the benevolence of white people. When he has his Lincoln-Douglas debates, for instance, in the 1850s, he refers to the fact that he would not want a Negro woman to intermarry with a white man. He has all of these views on race that are of that time. But as president, he was somebody who believed that slavery itself shouldn't spread into the West, which were two very different things in the mindset of the time.

Confederate States of America (CSA) white supremacist foundation

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Kerri Greenidge:

I know that there's a lot of debate, unfortunately, in terms of the United States, in terms of, well, these Southern States were not fighting the war because of slavery. And there's a great book by a man named Charles Dew, who's a historian. And he went and looked at all of the secession papers and petitions of Southern secession legislation. So these are the legislators who met between November 1860 or December, 1860, excuse me, and March, 1861, which they're basically going around in a circuit across the South urging Southern legislators to meet and to vote to secede from the Union. And the rhetoric that they're using in those pamphlets that they're sending around are making arguments that the Republican government they refer to, of course, the Union government as a Republican government, is standing on the wrong side of history and that the Confederate States will be the first country to stand by the solid truth that the African race is incapable of

self-government and that slavery is the natural state for people of African descent.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so even though the president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, initially in his speech before the CSA in early 1861 does not mention the word slavery. By mid 1861, as the war is unfolding, Alexander Stephens and other Southern secessionists are very clearly using the appeal to white supremacy to rally their States around segregation. Pointing to the fact, for instance, that slavery is the natural state, according to Alexander Stephens, of African descended people. And this was sort of part of a long history of how slavery in the United States shaped political ideology. One of them being this whole theory surrounding the organization of society, and there's a man named James Henry Hammond, who was a Senator from South Carolina, who came up with these political books in which he argued that basically society was not meant to be equal, that the founding fathers had been wrong.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And that basically, there were certain castes of people who were meant to eternally be the slaves of other people, and that those other people were the aristocracy that they were natural, that they were ordained and that to disrupt that was to disrupt the goal of God. And so there's a lot of that rhetoric that floated around within the Confederacy, particularly once the civil war began. And particularly, as the Confederacy wins various battles throughout 1861 and into 1862, the idea that the Confederacy had been chosen and that this way of conducting an organizing society was actually ordained by a higher power.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so one of the quotes that we have from the CSA in April, 1861, is that they stand by this truth that slavery is a natural state for the African and that

they are standing on the side of right, and not on the side of the founding fathers. So it's pretty unequivocal in terms of what Confederates themselves were saying about their plans for the society that comes or did they want to see happen? And that way of thinking was something that was endemic across the Southern plantation holding class, and even amongst many white people who did not own slaves. That there was sort of this natural order, and that getting rid of slavery disrupted an order that had been ordained by a high power.

How did Lincoln's opponents label him?

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

Lincoln was referred to as a "Black Republican." He was accused of having, at one point, having a black Negro mistress. He was accused of trying to inflict formerly enslaved people on to the South. And so there's all of this ugly rhetoric that surrounds him, that's in the mainstream press as well. There's also a lot of ugly rhetoric that comes out in terms of the people that join his cabinet, right? And sort of pointed to them as being somehow in bed with or aligning with enslaved people, particularly enslaved women.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So they're kind of turning this into a gender issue that somehow Lincoln is, and his cabinet are bringing sort of African-American women into their beds and into their homes. And that this is immoral. The irony of course, being that a lot of Southern slave holders at the time who were secessionists actually did have children with enslaved African-American women. So he's facing a lot of racial vitriol, the Republican party in general faced this racial vitriol and this idea that they were "Black Republicans." There were even newspapers

that accused Lincoln himself of being Black, that somehow he was masquerading as something that he was not as sort of racially at the time.

Frederick Douglass' response to Lincoln's first inaugural speech

00:37:24:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So when Frederick Douglas by 1861 was the most famous ex-slave in the United States. Frederick Douglass by 1860 had really gone from being someone who was a willing to work with white radical abolitionists to somebody who was willing to work with them, but really argued that it had to be on the terms that former slaves and the enslaved made for themselves. And so Lincoln gives his speech, his first inaugural address in 1861. And he does not mention that slavery will be an object of his administration or that it will even be a goal of what is going to unfold with the Southern States seceding. And so Frederick Douglass was really, really one of the most vocal abolitionists who argued that there was no way in which the United States government could make a union with slave holders. That Southerners had not just crossed the line in terms of the slavery issue, but also in terms of attacking and denigrating the federal constitution and the country itself.

And so this is a sort of a point in which the two, obviously not just disagree, but it really shows a difference between many Northerners who supported Lincoln after the attack on Fort Sumter, really were very different than many African-Americans who argued that this was a war for redemption and not really a war for the Union.

Drafts of the Emancipation Proclamation

00:38:54:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So by 1862, Lincoln begins to meet about setting forth a preliminary emancipation proclamation. And this was after various losses by the Union army at Bull Run in Virginia. And the idea that on the ground, enslaved people were fleeing and joining Union camps that were stationed primarily in South Carolina, the Islands of South Carolina, Virginia, and New Orleans. And so he begins to look at how can he use his power as an executive to pass a form of legislation that will force the Southern States to return back into the Union. And so in September, 1862, he submits the first draft of his Emancipation Proclamation, in which he argued that Southern States that continued to seceed from the country, their slaves were no longer considered their property, but if they chose to remain within the Union, they could continue to have their slaves. So he's walking this fine line between States that had openly seceded and had slaves, and States that had not yet seceded like Maryland, like Missouri, like Kentucky, and yet still had slaves.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so those places had sort of a strong unionist sentiment, even though they were slave holding States. And so his first foray into trying to deal with the constitutional and political repercussions of emancipation was to offer that emancipation could come or that the Southern States could be readmitted to the union, if they stopped rebelling against the United States. Very clearly, that was politically, realizing that that wasn't going to happen. And so on January 1st, 1863, he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which ended slavery in the rebelling areas of the South and provided that African-American people could enlist in the Union Army. And so one thing about the Emancipation Proclamation is that as historians and as political scientists and historians, we know that it did not free a single slave in the United States, so it didn't say that slavery was, was illegal in the United States.

What it did was it was a political moment that for the first time recognized that enslavement on American soil was incompatible with a political institution, which had never happened before. So this was the first time as weak as it was, in terms of African-American rights and African-American emancipation, it changed the course of how it was that people talked about the war. It also changed the way that foreign powers looked at the war.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So a place like England that had been considering supporting the Confederacy, once Lincoln comes out and makes the war about enslavement and freeing slaves, Britain then withdraws its support potential support from the Southern States.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

England, again, 70% of their cotton that they use in their textiles came from the South. So economically, it's one thing. There was also a lot of affection between the lifestyle that was this heavily hierarchical society in the American South and segments of the English population, which sort of liked the fact that, or liked the fact that the South had this theory of hierarchy and that it was a natural thing. Once, however, Lincoln's emancipation proclamation came out, the British government would have found it difficult to support the Confederacy because Britain itself in 1833 ended enslavement in its colonies. And so that would have been, politically, it would have been something that would have not have been advantageous for England.

The constant resistance of enslaved people

00:42:57:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

White Southerners' fear of Black violence was what drew and created and installed the racial laws that they had within their States that were written often and mostly into their legislation. So really from the time slavery begins in the 17th century, white slaveholders had an intense fear of the rebellion revolt of enslaved people. Part of this had to do with the history of rebellion amongst African people across the Atlantic world. So we know that enslaved people continuously revolted in various ways. There's stories about a great book by Vincent Brown called *Tacky's Revolt*, which happens in Jamaica and in the Caribbean. We have Bussa's Rebellion in Barbados. And so there's a constant rebellion by enslaved Africans. And so slave holders, particularly in the United States, were constantly fearful that African descendant people were going to rebel. And this was actually true.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So we know that enslaved people rebelled in certain ways. It looked different, it had different character based on what region of the country and what time period people existed in. But we know for instance, in what becomes Georgia and South Carolina, enslaved people running and joining the Spanish, who were stationed in Florida, and joining the native people who had founded their own forts within Florida, and then going across the border and attacking white slaveholders for goods and for food. And so we know that this was not an idle fear.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

We also know that by the time we get to the 18th century, a state like South Carolina had established all of these rules governing African-American people in response to the Stono Rebellion. The Stono Rebellion was a rebellion by African-American people in the Stono river, in South Carolina, in which enslaved people basically tore through the countryside, going into plantations, killing white slaveholders with preparation to eventually start a slave rebellion in the South. They were stopped, but that was terrifying to

whites in the South who then went and rewrote many of their laws that outlawed things like drumming because the theory was that Africans were drumming and that was a signal to one another.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

Things like having to be inside after dark, having to have permission from a white person to walk along the streets, et cetera. So when we talk about slave rebellion and we have to talk about slavery itself, enslaved people constantly rebelling. And that the white fear of rebellion could lead to instances in which the white people were wrong. So we know for instance, Denmark Vesey's revolt in South Carolina, once again – was that really a revolt? Or was it a moment in which white fears of revolt? But we also know that Black people did revolt. So one of the things to point about slavery is that it created that type of environment, where there's fear. Fear mostly by and with due cause by enslaved African people, but also by white people who realize, right, that they're living in a society in which enslaved people do not want to be enslaved.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so having to invent all this language surrounding what Black people want to be enslaved, right? That really doesn't come until closer to the Civil War, and then after the Civil War, really were there was this argument that Black people are treated well. That they can't survive by being free. That the South is not as violent as it was, that they treat slaves well. And all of that was part of this convincing, of trying to convince sort of the white Southern mindset that their fears, which were rampant, were somehow not true. And yet we know that they were true that then that white slave holders in the South were often expressed fear of the slaves that serve them.

The outcome of the Civil War in relation to demands of enslaved people

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So in Louisiana, the Union army ended up arriving in New Orleans. And so New Orleans itself was a city that was under Union control, even though Louisiana, as a state had Confederates in it and still had slavery. The Plaquemines Parish and the Plaquemines plantation was a plantation in which African-Americans continued to work on the sugar plantation as a Civil War got underway. And yet the enslaved people on this plantation argued that they should be paid, that they should be compensated for their labor because they realized slavery had ended. So this is 1861 and going into 1862. And the enslaved African-American women in particular refusing to harvest the crop until they were paid what they should be paid in terms of the wage. What I should also point out about that is that this was one event, but one among many in which this happened across the South.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So we see this in Louisiana. We see it in Port Royal, in South Carolina, where African-Americans continue to cultivate the cotton, but demand wages and they end up being paid. And so this was part of, even as the Civil War was unfolding, even as Lincoln himself as president, was debating whether or not this was a war about slavery and was very adamant that it was a war about Union. African-American people, particularly African-American women, are protesting, right? And they're protesting by re-demanding that they be paid. Work stoppages, we know what happened throughout the South during the Civil War, picking up and leaving and running away. And so it really speaks to this idea that the war itself is conducted and has an outcome based on how Black people themselves are responding. And that in Plaquemines Parish, the white landowners were not going to pay Black people. They hadn't paid them for however many decades. They're going to have to consider this as the

Black workers on their- protest for their pay and also protest against their treatment.

There was always Black resistance to slavery

00:49:27:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So one of the things we know is that the term riot, particularly before the Civil War really referred to white communities, rioting very violently against Black communities. So there's a series of riots that occur where white people, particularly in Northern cities like Philadelphia and Boston and Cincinnati, Providence, Rhode Island, white people were upset that Black people were free and were living in those cities, and so rioted against them. And so before the Civil War, there are not a lot of examples of Black people rioting. And so that was actually a racial term that referred to white people rioting against Black progress. In terms of resistance, when African-American enslaved people resisted slavery, it accounts for all the varieties of ways in which they would do that. And it accounts for the fact that often this was a resistance, not just to enslavement, but to the entire system, economic, political, legal that was framing and seeking to dominate, and define them as human beings. The idea of rebellion, the slaves rebelled, but it also gives us idea if you say rebellion that somehow it's one instance, right? And then it ends. And we know historically that there were lots of forms of resistance over time. That they might be Nat Turner's Rebellion, or they might be enslaved people running away to the Dismal Swamp in Northern North Carolina, staying in there, and then returning, because they had family that were there and they're disrupting the economic system that exists.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So the idea of resistance, we have to think of it as occurring across the spectrum and occurring different ways, different spaces. And those forms of resistance – learning from what happened before and perfecting it, right? So the idea that somehow, there's one rebellion and it doesn't work and therefore Black people didn't rebel, historically, we know that there's constant, constant resistance. That could be individual, it could be collective, but that Black people are constantly resisting this system that existed for over 200 years.

Black abolitionists and The Christiana Rebellion

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

Pennsylvania was a state that was right on the border with the slaveholding South, it was considered as a boundary line that even though it was a free state, it had gradual emancipation, which meant that there were still enslaved people in Pennsylvania up until the 1840s, before the state actually got rid of slavery. So, even though it was a free state, you had this combination of African American people who were not legally enslaved, but up until the 1840s didn't have many rights underneath the law. And in fact, the rights that they did have were taken away gradually by the 1830s. So, we know that African American people could vote in Pennsylvania and then that right was taken away by the 1830s. By the time you get to the 1850s and Christiana, you have a entire generation apparatus group of African American people throughout Pennsylvania, but also in specifically in Philadelphia who had been organizing against, not just enslavement, but also the fact that slavery existed in some forms and its repercussions existed in some forms across the state of Pennsylvania.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, the Christiana Riot happened in response to years and decades of a practice whereby Southern slaves would escape. They'd escape over the border into Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania was nominally a free state, and yet those enslaved people being captured by slave catchers and returned to the South. And so, this had been occurring relentlessly in Pennsylvania, specifically in Philadelphia, going back to the 1780s and the Christiana Riot was one of those moments in which the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 strengthened the right of slave holders. So, it said that if you were a slave holder and your slave escaped, you could now use federal power to reclaim your slave. And that if a judge ruled against the person you're pursuing being a slave, they did not receive as much money as they would receive if they ruled that person, wasn't a slave. So, it's this whole sort of mechanism.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, at Christiana, you have the town gathered together to protect enslaved people who are in the town. We have to think that it is 1851. It's at a moment when additional riots had occurred to save enslaved people in Ohio, in Massachusetts, in Rhode Island and that this is one of them. And so, they armed themselves. They protect themselves against the seizure of the enslaved people in Christiana. And as a result, they are put on trial, which was perfectly legal in the laws of the time, given the Fugitive Slave Law.

And eventually the participants are found not guilty, but one thing to point out about the Christiana Riot, is if we just think of how much of a risk it was to take to defy this law. Because it was 1851. At that point, most abolitionists, and certainly many African Americans really believe that the country was in a moment of a standstill between slaveholders and non-slaveholders, that the federal government could not protect and had no interest in protecting or living up to its ideals.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, it's really this last gasp where this, this first gasp in the 1850s of a community really believing and rightly so, that they don't have the law, the constitution, or the morality of any institution on their side. And so that they have to take into their own hands how it is that their community is going to function.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So what we know about this community in Christiana is the slaveholder coming into this village. But at the time, what we know about Christiana is that it had a very vibrant, very active, very militant Black community that lived in the town. And that when they hear that a slave catcher, a slave owner is coming into the area to reclaim their slave, that they have an elaborate system of protecting their communities and protecting themselves.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And one of the system was to signal one another when there was an approach by a slave catcher. The other thing that we know is that the residents and citizens of Christiana were very tapped into the abolitionist movement in larger communities, such as Pittsburgh and in Philadelphia. And so, when slave catchers arrived in the town, the shootout that proceeded was really started by the enslaved woman, Eliza Parker, ringing a bell, which she was known to do in the community when there were outsiders coming in and then being attacked and shot at by the federal marshals as they descended on Christiana.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

One thing to also point out about the Christiana Riot is that it really gives us an idea of how well-organized Black abolitionists communities were. We tend to think of them as being, you know, responding to slave catchers after the

fact and not looking at the ways in which communities like the one in Christiana were really fortresses against enslavement that were very well organized. And even though they are shot at and Eliza Parker was shot. They end up resisting through the fortitude of the community and the fortitude of themselves.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

The Parker's were eventually transported to Canada. Canada was a separate country. It was a country at the time that would not turn over fugitive slaves. And so, they are one of the approximately 3000 African Americans, some of whom were formerly enslaved, who crossed the border before the Civil War and settled in Canada.

Mutual aid societies

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So, the ways in which free African American communities functioned in the North and in the South, and we know that the largest free Black communities in the country existed across in little towns and cities across the South. But one of the things that was very important was were these mutual aid societies. So, beginning as early as the 1770s and 1780s, free African Americans forming collectives through which they helped bury one another, form schools, in the case of free states for African American children, financial institutions where they put together money to pull together, to support themselves and to support the elderly.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And by the time we get to the eve of the Civil War in the 1850s, these had really become a part of African American life, both amongst free people and

amongst enslaved people. And so, you have mutual aid societies that existed across the North. You have something called Vigilance Committees, which were organized beginning in the 1840s, in which African Americans and their white allies created committees of people who would organize and raise money to number one, transport slaves out of the country and to freedom, but also raise money to support efforts, to protect communities like the one at Christiana, from harassment, by police officers and slave catchers.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So, this idea of mutual aid, mutual beneficial societies have this long history within the African American community and within individual African American political consciousness. In other words, by the Civil War, many people, Frederick Douglass is one of them, really see these as going to be being the heart of creating a free society for Black people. That they have their own institutions, they have their own churches, they have their own mutual aid. They have their own way of comforting and supporting one another that was absent from the federal government and from the cities and states in which they lived.

The threats free Blacks abolitionists faced

00:59:42:00

Kerri Greenidge:

The biggest risk for African-American people, particularly free African-American people was the threat of constantly being re-enslaved. We know that for instance, there's great work that's come out by historians recently about the ways in which authorities in New York City, for instance, were in partnership with slave catchers and slave brokerage firms and were actively kidnapping African-American, particularly children who were free and reselling them back into the South.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So, this was the biggest threat to African-American existence, particularly if you were a free person. And particularly if you lived in one of the communities that were on the border with the South, but really if you just existed and lived as a free person.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

The other issue that occurred amongst free African American people was being cut out of and prohibited from being a part of everyday life in a republic, in the United States. So, not being allowed to attend school, being cut out of certain jobs, being prevented from living and working in certain areas of cities and towns. In New England, there was something called warning out, which meant that up until the early 1800s, if you were a town and the white people in this town decided they did not want a Black person there, they could get together and basically expel you from the town.

And so, it gets into this idea that mutual aid societies, churches, that Black people created amongst themselves. Those are really the institutions that sustain and support a community that was really vulnerable, not just to being the enslaved, but to being completely marginalized from the communities in which they lived.

01:01:21:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And I spoke earlier about this notion of violence and the term riot, and the fact that really that came from white communities, rioting against Black people in their midst. And so, we know that throughout the 1830s, 1840s, northern cities exploded in violence. One of them in Philadelphia where white townspeople we know got together a week beforehand, planned it out and spent a week sort of harassing, destroying, and setting fire and breaking windows in the Black community in Philadelphia costing multiple...

thousands of dollars' worth of damages leading Black people to leave the city and to flee.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, when we look at mutual aid societies, we look at something like the creation of the Black church. And we look at Black abolitionists, really Black abolitionists were existing on a more radical plane than white abolitionists. And that they really looked at not just the end of slavery, not just slavery, being a moral issue, but that they were really out to dismantle the entire racial system that existed in the United States that prevented them from participating on an equal field.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, as early as the 1820s, Black abolitionists are creating their own schools, trying to create their own college by 1830s, because they recognize that that would be something that free African-American people needed for their life after emancipation.

"Enslaved people freed themselves" and other learnings from Frederick Douglass' writings

01:02:50:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

One of the things that Frederick Douglass was very good at, was researching and collecting the stories of enslaved people like himself and finding a way to record them. So, Frederick Douglass, by 1853, edited an incarnation of his paper. It was at one time called the *North Star* then became *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and then *Frederick Douglass' Monthly*.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, one of things that he did was to interview formerly enslaved people and tell their stories within his newspaper. And he talked to a descendant who had worked on the Washington plantation, Mount Vernon. He talked to descendants of the plantation owned by Thomas Jefferson in Virginia. And he really focused on the ways in which people emancipated and freed themselves. And that African American people for the most part were not freed by somebody. It usually happened because either they paid for their own freedom or they escaped in some way.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, using the stories that Douglass did to illustrate the fact that freedom required agitation and that enslaved people themselves had to constantly fight against the forces that were preventing them from realizing their freedom.

How Black resistance shaped public opinion in the North

01:04:19:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So, one of the ways in which African-American resistance changed the way the country entered the Civil War, was that for most Northerners, by the 1840s, 1850s, enslavement and slavery as it existed at the time in the South was very abstract. Few white Northerners had been in or lived in a society, close to a society in which African-American people were walking on the street and they could be picked up and put into jail.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Once the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law was passed, it made it so that slaveholders could come into the North and they could reclaim people who they claim to be their slaves. And so, for many white Americans, not all, but for many, this

was something that was shocking, if not, because it had to do with African-American people, but because it had to do with this whole notion of states being allowed to decide how slavery would function in their own borders.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, by the 1850s, all of this rhetoric surrounding popular sovereignty, this notion that people should be able to decide how they're governed. And this was something that the Southern states wanted when they talked about the Kansas-Nebraska Act. If you're going to argue for popular sovereignty, many white Northerners would argue shouldn't Northern States have the right to have their own popular sovereignty, which meant that Northern States had chosen that slavery would not exist.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

This did not necessarily mean that those people in those Northern states were abolitionists. It did mean if they had a problem with the idea that Southern states would come in and dictate to Northern states how to conduct their affairs and not just that, but use money and manpower to come into Northern states like Christiana and take people from their homes. This was something that most white Northerners were not familiar with and had not seen and they had grown up in a society where they didn't see that happen every day.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

A good example of this in Boston, the rescue of Anthony Burns in 1854. There were many white people in Boston in particular because of the wealth involved in the slave trade, who were... rejected the rhetoric of free soil and when they saw an African American man named Anthony Burns being dragged through Boston with chains on, in 1854, you had thousands of

people who went to downtown Boston. They turned off the candles in their windows. They were shocked that this was happening in their city.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So, in terms of resistance, pushing the conversation and the argument forward, it really is a moment when, again, African American people and the ways in which they react ends up dictating the terms upon which white Americans then argue about freedom and what it will look like. Most of the white people, say, in New England who responded to fugitive slave rescues, if they had not seen that, many of them probably would have been either indifferent or taken this view that slavery would eventually die out and it was a Southern affair.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Once you have people coming into neighborhoods and communities, kidnapping people, and the wheels of justice in a state cannot decide what that looks like. That really did a lot to push many people who were not necessarily anti-slavery to at least be sympathetic to the fact that slavery was infringing upon their rights as citizens in a Northern state.

Frances Watkins Harper
01:08:08:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper is one of my favorite people from history. She's born free in Baltimore, Maryland. Her family was part of a free Black family that worked a lot on building these institutions amongst Black people in Baltimore. She was orphaned at a young age. She eventually became a poet and became a lecturer with the American Anti-Alavery Society, touring around the country, speaking out against slavery. And she was a poet, very prolific poet who wrote poems, that alluded to the Bible and deliverance from

oppression, but also wrote about the experiences of particularly Black women under slavery.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was, for somebody whose footprints are all over history, it's amazing that so much of her has not been explored by many historians. Although, there's people like Martha Jones, who's done a wonderful job of exploring her and others who have done work, but she really was somebody who linked the fight against slavery to the fight for equality for women, and really argued that slavery had to be thought of as this total system that didn't just enslave Black men, it enslaved Black people and that African American women and their particular form of exploitation was part of how slavery was constructed in the United States.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

She got married. She disappeared from the scene for a little bit in the 1850s and then when her husband died by the end of the Civil War, she became, once again, became a poet and wrote a lot of work on this contradiction between on one hand, the American government, arguing that they wanted African-American people to be sufficient. And on the other hand, standing in the way of providing ways in which that could happen for instance, with schools and the lack of attention to land redistribution.

Black abolitionists

01:10:17:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

You also have people like the Purvis brothers who were African-American men who were born in South Carolina, came to or went to Philadelphia and helped found the vigilance committees. You have the Fortens, you have all of

these communities of Black people who were radical abolitionists in the sense that they really believed that the country needed to live up to a notion of representing, being represented by people who were voted and decided upon by the people and having equal rights and opportunity before the law.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Why do they fight? Well, I think that's a difficult question. I think that many people, many African-American people who were free, who lived in the North, had family who were still enslaved, which gives an idea of how entrenched the slave system was in the country. So, you could be an African American person who was free. And the Purvis family in Philadelphia is a good example of this, and yet have relatives who were still enslaved in the South. And so, for most Black people, this was something that was very personal. You could marry somebody for instance and live free and then suddenly you find out that that person's family or that person themselves is suspected of being a former slave. And so, it was very personal for African American people.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

I should say that we, in realizing that, we also shouldn't collapse the notion that every single Black person was an abolitionist. You did have people, and David Walker spoke about this, Frederick Douglass spoke about this, Frances Harper spoke about this, that there always have been people in every society who have tended to take the tactic of non-resistance. Choosing not to protest in the face of tremendous exploitation and injustice. And those people were as much a part of the Black community as they have been at any other time.

The difference in the period before the Civil War, however, is that because you had Black families who were so intertwined with slavery, and because of the majority of Black people had family members, husbands, wives who were still enslaved, slavery was very real to them in a way that we often miss,

particularly as historians, we think that somebody was free in Massachusetts or in Pennsylvania, but if you know your grandparents or your uncles or your in-laws are enslaved in another place, this is very, very personal and very visceral to you as a person.

Why are the most famous abolitionists white men?

01:13:00:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

It's a good question of why... The story of abolition that we tell ourselves... Americans, I think, and I think this is true of everybody, but I just think specifically in America, I think it has to do with the ways in which white abolitionists very early on, started talking about themselves. And so, by the 1830s, 1840s, you have many white abolitionists who, when they're writing their memoirs or they're writing a biography of themselves or of their friends who were abolitionists, tended to not mention the Black people who were there, even though we know that the Black people were there.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, it was part about recreating and narrating what was happening that didn't necessarily align with what was actually happening. So, a good example of this is somebody like the Grimké sisters, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, who are former slave holders. They became women's rights activists in the 1830s. And they talk all about the fact that they joined this Philadelphia female anti-slavery society. And they did. And that society was a women's anti-slavery society. Did a lot of work, but in a lot of their writings, they failed to mention the Black women who were actually there before they got there, who helped organize this in the 1830s.

01:14:16:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, part of the reason why many contemporary historians tended to not see Black people in there was because if you were just to rely on what white abolitionists said about being an abolitionist, that's the story that you would get.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

The other thing is that this more infringes on how we look at the abolition movement, is that there still is this notion that somehow, because people were enslaved, they were somehow not human beings who were capable of interacting with the economy and politics in which they lived. And that somehow, you know, this is the myth of the enslaved person who somehow is not as bright, not as accomplished, not as knowing, not as plugged into the political currents that are going on as white people around them. And so, I think that has a lot to do with, in terms of historians.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And then, there's the third, which I think is the biggest reason, which is that this whole invention of the lost cause myth, this idea that after the civil war, the South loses the civil war and that generation of white Southerners who lost the civil war begin to invent all of these stories about what slavery was. And they start to invent this myth of the South being a paternalistic, friendly family-like place. That there was a... seen as a plantation, but the plantation was really a family, that Black people were not ill-treated and that, in fact, why would you ill treat your enslaved people because they were part of the family or they were money for your household.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, that type of myth that was really manufactured and historians did a lot of work on this, of uncovering when this starts to happen. That tended to

mean that that became how historians, white historians, I should say, approach talking about slavery, which was that, "Oh, it wasn't as bad as people thought it was, it was actually just kind of this benevolent kind of minor institution and therefore, why would you listen to what enslaved people have to say? They were actually pretty well taken care of and even if they believe that they weren't, they actually were."

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so, it's kind of this process of creating that myth that then creates the notion that well, abolitionists were probably just white people from the North who were butting into life in the South and they were well-meaning, but they really didn't understand what our system was in the South, and abolitionists, you know, yes, they were self-righteous, and they were holy, but they really didn't understand and so, that becomes kind of the rhetoric.

And so, in order to tell that story, you would have to cut out African-American people as abolitionists, because you would have to argue that really abolition wasn't really necessary. It didn't really have an effect on anything and that white people who were abolitionists, they were really kind of snooty Northerners who were, you know, didn't understand the way real folks quote unquote` in the South were living.

Frederick Douglass v. William Lloyd Garrison

01:17:21:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

I think that this split between Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison also had a lot to do with– William Lloyd Garrison was a pacifist. He did not believe in using arms to end slavery although he was sympathetic to someone like David Walker. He did not believe that the Constitution of the United States

was a document that could support anti-slavery. He really believed that it was a slaveholding document.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Douglass, when he escaped from slavery, became a spokesperson for the anti-slavery cause, traveled to England, publishes a narrative of his life and really became kind of the face that most Northerners first saw when they encountered this discussion about slavery. In that, that caused a lot of issues within the anti-slavery movement in that Douglass was often seen as he can only be the emotional voice. He has no real analytic or political notions to add. And so up until Frederick Douglass starts to ta lk back against that, the relationship between Douglass and the white anti-slavery machine was pretty stable. Once Douglass decided, number one, to start his own newspaper, *The North Star*, which would directly compete with Garrison's *Liberator*, that was one of the first things that happens. The Black press at the time, if you could write a newspaper that would attract African-American leaders, you had an audience that was built in, because you have your Black communities that are hungry for a newspaper that's going to reflect their communities and their concerns. *The Liberator* did do that, but the *North Star* did it in a different way because it was done by a Black editor and with Black interests.

01:19:20:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

There was also by the 1840s, Douglass really seeing that the Constitution, the political system as it existed, could be used in some ways to push against slavery. So he was a big believer in this Liberty Party, which is a predecessor to the Free Soil Party and the Republican Party. Garrison argued that he was apolitical, that he could not support a political party or institution because it was pro-slavery.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Douglass by the 1840s is reading and studying the law and really arguing that there is anti-slavery within the structures of the Constitution that abolitionists can use. And so they have a split over this, but Douglass also had a split with other white abolitionists, who he saw as not using their platform beyond this idea of moral suasion, which was what Garrison thought. Garrison thought if you appeal to people's moral sense, their Christian sense, their idea of morality, eventually the white people are going to come around and have a moral attack on slavery. And Douglass by the 1840s, living as a now free man with children and family of his own, really starts to question that whole idea that you can convince somebody that slavery is wrong. He really believed that slavery, like David Walker pointed out, would only end if there was a form of powerful, armed resistance and that that was inevitable if slavery didn't end.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So Douglass had a falling out with white abolitionists and white anti-slavery activists. But I should say that he still was beloved by many members of the white abolitionist community because of his support for women's rights throughout the 1840s and 1850s. So on one hand he's losing his friendship with Garrison. On the other hand, he's gaining a friendship with controversial figures in the white women's and anti-slavery movement like Elizabeth Cady Stanton by the 1850s. So he definitely was somebody who, as an orator, as a political being, he shifted away from the idea that he just was a figurehead who spoke about emotions. He really was talking about action in politics and what could actually be done in the legal apparatus that existed.

Enslaved people escaping to Union lines

01:21:52:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

In terms of numbers, we don't know a lot of numbers, but to put it in perspective, so four million people are enslaved in the United States at the start of the Civil War. By 1864, there's tens of thousands of Black people who are farming land in the islands off the coast of South Carolina. You have thousands of Black people in New Orleans, such as at Plaquemines Parish who are refusing to work unless they get paid. And then you have, as the Union Army makes it way into the South, hundreds of letters that are sent by Union Army officers saying, "What do we do with the Black people who are part of our unit as we're moving?" And so in terms of the exact numbers, that would be hard to detect. In terms of the effect that that had on the Union, it cannot be overstated.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

I mean, the fact that you have white people coming to fight for the Union before Blacks could enlist, and those white people are told and believe that they're really just fighting to keep the Union together, and then they get to Virginia and Black people come and the Black people are the ones who are doing the work where they're stationed in the South. They're the ones who know what the South actually looks like in the land. Harriet Tubman, for instance, becomes a scout for the Union Army because she knows what the land looks like down in the South. Whereas the North had very few actual relevant maps of what the South actually looked like and how to make their maneuver their way through.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

You have instances in the Southwest, such as the border with Kansas, where you have rifle guards, where there's Black men, who are the ones who are supporting the Union. Whereas white men, some of them are Confederates, some of them are not, and some of them just don't really care. So it really

changes the way that the Union, particularly in terms of policy views Black people.

01:23:49:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And after African-Americans could enlist in the Army, that's the game changer in terms of what is the value of African-American soldiers. And for the first time African-American soldiers were allowed to enlist. They enlisted on a segregated basis, their treatment, they were not paid as much as white soldiers and they were often the first to be put into combat and so forth. But it was also a statement that the fact that the American military looked at someone who was a soldier as having the potential to be an officer and a gentleman, that's a term that they would use, that's completely counter to how most Americans viewed the capabilities and promise of African-American people.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

By 1863, the question then becomes, how do you compensate African-Americans who have fought in the war? Most Americans had this view that if you fought for the country and served the country, you deserved a pension and you deserve to be decorated. And so what happens then when you have Black soldiers. Logically, it would mean that those people would have a certain form of reverence within the broader society.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So in terms of numbers, again, I will say we don't know the numbers. We do know though that this is a constant refrain on the ground in the Union Army. We do know that it leads to the founding of certain towns and locations across the South that became free enclaves. There's a place called Mitchellville that is organized off the coast of South Carolina, areas of

Louisiana, areas of Texas, where Black people are basically self-sufficient and supporting the economy. And so this is a process that has a definitive effect on how the Union Army and how Union policy approaches slavery and emancipation.

Lincoln's 1862 colonization meeting

01:25:43:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

The idea of colonization had been one that was proposed as early as the 1780s when slavery was first viewed in creating the American Constitution. By 1817, there was a group called the American Colonization Society. And this was a society that most whites, including someone like William Lloyd Garrison, if they were anti-slavery, initially joined. And basically it was founded by religious minds, early 1800s, but also slave holders in mostly the upper South who believed that slavery as an institution would gradually end. And that therefore, when African-American people were freed, they should be relocated and repatriated back to Africa. And so from the ACS, the American Colonization Society, the United States ended up creating a colony called Liberia. And the capitol Monrovia was named for the president, James Monroe. And there were a small cadre of African-American people in the early part of the 19th century who supported colonization, someone like a Paul Cuffe, who was a sail maker and a businessman who lived off the coast of Nantucket. You had some African Americans who were manumitted in North Carolina and were relocated to Liberia. So this wasn't as if it was a foreign concept.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

The issue many African-Americans had with this, however, was that who would be controlling capital, economics, culture, politics if African-Americans were relocated somewhere, number one. Number two, what did it mean that African-American people were being told that they had to leave the country and that there was no plan to end slavery in the country? So in other words, colonizationists didn't argue that slavery had to end in the United States. The contrary, they're arguing that free Black people, if they are freed, should be sent somewhere else. And so it's this idea that somehow the American body politic is above the sophistication level, political level, needs and wants of African-American people. So in 1862, Lincoln is like many white antislavery activists who were still clinging to this idea that if slavery ended, you could relocate the free Black community to somewhere else.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And there have been ideas about relocating them to Haiti. The idea that they could go there, West Africa, some colony in Central America was the way it was worded. And so in 1862, as he's writing and planning to write the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln meets with a group of African American delegates.

01:28:33:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And he's meeting with this group of all men and this group, he talks about the fact that in Lincoln's mind, the future of the country is not one that can support Black people. That the country will never be a place where Black people can live, and therefore he proposes that they be relocated.

And even though someone like a Martin Delany believed initially that African-American people should be relocated, Martin Delany begins to believe that the country is being reborn, through the Civil War, and that if the country is being reborn, it's being reborn because Black people are at the center of that. That Black people are the ones by escaping who are recreating

what it means to be the United States. And so by early 1863, many of the men who met with Lincoln at that meeting in 1862 have either joined the Union Army or are encouraging other African-Americans to do so. And so Lincoln, it's his last gasp and attempt to enact this program.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

I should say though, that the idea of relocating African-Americans outside of the country, didn't end with the Civil War. And in fact, after the Civil War, there were many African-Americans as well, who argued that Black people should be repatriated elsewhere. But Lincoln has this meeting in 1862, it's really a result of the Emancipation Proclamation that that idea then is no longer at the forefront of his policy. And part of that has to do with the reaction of the African-Americans in the room when he approaches them about the prospect.

Frances Watkins Harper's critique of colonization and Lincoln

01:30:22:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's critique really had to do with the fact that African-American people had been in the country since the country's founding, that the country belonged to Black people as much as if not more than it did to white people, and that Black people could rebuild and reframe the country in a way that reflected the ideals that were in place in the 18th century, but never came to fruition. Harper was also somebody who really believed that education of the formerly enslaved was the way that you were going to build up African-American communities. You were going to create an educated populace that would then vote and be able to represent themselves in Congress and in the halls of government. So someone like a Frances Harper

was very critical of colonization as were many abolitionist spokeswomen during the time.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

One of the things that not just Frances Ellen Watkins Harper but other African-Americans pointed to about Lincoln, is that they mistrusted this notion that he was somebody who took on the currents of whatever it was other white men were saying at the time, that there was a criticism that he didn't have really original thoughts about slavery and how to end it, that it was really something that, although he was anti-slavery, that's not to say that he wasn't, but he didn't have really any original ideas or takes on it. And that he was really, I think Harper's quote shows this, the idea of many African-Americans was that he was merely rehashing arguments that had been made back in 1817, and not really realizing that the current had changed, that African-American people themselves, the vast majority, were not going to relocate, and that this wasn't actually a plan.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Harper and others would argue, this is not a plan for rearranging American and revolutionizing American policy. It's an opinion, but it's not really a plan. So there was a lot of criticism for him for that, as Harper would point out. There was also a lot of criticism for him because the question of what were you going to do with all this land that Southerners abandoned and that Black people were still on, and that Black people were farming and in some cases were being paid to farm, and yet there's no policy enacted that puts that into law. And so, when Harper is criticizing him for colonization, as when many African-American abolitionists criticized Lincoln in 1862, they're not just talking and reflecting on his plan for colonization. They're really responding to the fact that the war is moving in a direction that up until early 1863 Lincoln didn't publicly acknowledge.

01:33:22:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

He didn't publicly note that the reality on the ground, Northerners, is that slavery is dissolving because Black people are fleeing and because the white South is collapsing. And so once the white South starts to collapse, the people who are running the economy, as they've always done, are the Black people who are doing the labor and continuing to produce the cotton and the rice and the sugar. So the criticism of Lincoln is not merely that he was a colonizationist in 1862, it was that he did not in many people's opinion, many radical abolitionists' opinion, did not have a foresight into what he was actually going to create once the Civil War ended.

The genesis & significance of the Emancipation Proclamation

01:34:12:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So the Emancipation Proclamation was a political document, albeit a significant parameter-changing political document. And so one of the things that Lincoln wrestled with from the beginning of Southern secession was the fact that you had Southern states that seceded, so they're creating the CSA, Confederate States of America. They own slaves. And yet then you have four states that were border states that had enslaved people, but that didn't officially secede. And as president, Lincoln had to politically figure out how to make sure those states did not secede. And not only that, those States could be relied upon to help the Union Army transport from the North into the South. So with this, the idea of saying that slavery ended was not something that was going to appeal to the border states. You had a lot of slave holders in those states, you had a lot of enslaved people in those states. And so politically, Lincoln struggled with the idea of how to appeal to them.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

By 1862, the Battle of Bull Run, the idea that this war, but with the Southern states was not going to end quickly which had been the mistaken belief of many in the North, Lincoln began to consult about making emancipation a condition if the South refused to return to the Union. Knowing that probably the Southern states that had seceded would not return to the Union, but also knowing that the border states in all likelihood could not then take this as an assault on slavery as an institution. They could take it as a reward for them being loyal to the government because the Emancipation Proclamation did not free any slaves. And it actually said, if you were not rebelling from the federal government, you could keep your slaves. And so people were still enslaved in Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Maryland.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So the Emancipation Proclamation was a political move. However, the thing that the Emancipation Proclamation did is that once it was passed in 1863, African-American people recognized it as a rebirth of freedom, and this was a phrase that was used often by Black spokespeople in early 1863. It allowed Black people to now formally enlist in the Union Army, although African-Americans in Louisiana and Kansas had already formed militia companies and were fighting. This was the proclamation that said they could join the federal government. And it's really the first time that the federal government, an executive of the United States, has said that enslavement is incompatible with the United States. No other leader had ever said that.

01:37:03:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

In fact, most white politicians up until 1860 would not have argued that slavery was incompatible. It was very, very rare that you would find a white politician who would be like a Charles Sumner and argue that we cannot

exist, that slavery had to be abolished immediately, even if they were antislavery. So the Emancipation Proclamation had a profound effect. It also affected the way that white Northerners viewed the war. If you were a white Northerner and you had fought in the war, by 1863 there's drafting, a draft of working class people across the North into the Union Army. Many of those people then equate the war with freeing the slaves. And there are multiple riots, the biggest one being in New York, against enlistment and against the Black population, by white people within those cities. And so it changes the focus of the war. It changes it for the better in terms of African-Americans seeing it as this road to emancipation. It also changes it in terms of the backlash against emancipation that arises in the North during 1863 and 1864.

Compensated emancipation in Washington D.C.

01:38:18:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So Washington D.C., as the capital of the United States, had been arguing over the place of slavery within Washington, D.C., since 1800 as soon as it became a capital. And that was because, number one, D.C. is carved from states that existed. So the question was, what did it mean if you carve out this district, it's the capital of the government, and yet slaves are being held within that territory, in that district? You also had the issue that Washington, D.C. had a slave market, so where slaves were sold right in view of the White House. So what did this mean that slavery and slave trading occurred in the capital city of the United States? And then you also had enslaved people who worked in the White House who were owned by politicians. So if you're a politician before 1860 and you traveled to D.C. for Congress or Senate, you would bring your enslaved people with you. And so what did that mean?

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So this had been a battle that had been brewing in Washington, D.C. since 1790. When it is set to become a district. By the 1850s, Washington, D.C. was one of the Southern cities that actually had more free Black people in its environs than enslaved people, but slavery still existed. And because it was the capital, slave owners would travel in and out with their slaves, which became a strain on the free Black community and also on what did that actually mean? Should you be allowed as a slave holder from Mississippi who had such a say in the government be allowed to bring your enslaved person with you, keep them enslaved and then returned to Mississippi?

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So by 1850, the slave trade through the Fugitive Slave Law was outlawed, but slavery was still allowed to exist in Washington, D.C.. By 1862, abolitionists had been urging, this had been going back 30 years, for an abolition of slavery within the country's capital, arguing two things. One was that it was not legal to hold enslaved people because it was a district and not a state, and number two, because on the moral grounds that it was this black eye, as Theodore Weld would say, on the eye of the nation.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so 1862, slavery was ended in Washington, D.C., but the caveat was that slaveholders should be compensated for their slaves, that they quote-unquote "lost" by their slaves being free and compensated emancipation was something that, politically, people in the government had been arguing, but something that abolitionists in particular argued was untenable, that you should not be paying people and compensating people for the release of their enslaved people. The argument on the other side, for people who wanted them to be compensated, was that Britain when they outlawed slavery in

their colonies compensated slaveholders in those colonies. So it became an argument on compensation, but it also became a reflection of this division within the Republican Party.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

What would happen? Yes, we're anti-slavery, yes, they were Free Soil, but what did the mechanics of that look like? And many, if not a majority of Republicans, 1862, still believed that slavery was something that could be gotten rid of by gradualism, by compensation and by really appeasing white slave holders, as opposed to immediate emancipation for the enslaved.

The long process of emancipation up through the 1960s

01:42:04:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

I would say the moment you have the creation of enslavement on North American soil is the moment you have enslaved people contesting and pushing back against that so going back to the 17th century. Slavery waning and morphing in the 18th century across the New England states, but growing across the South by the time you have the revolution, slavery becoming so entrenched in the United States in the early 19th century before the Civil War that economically and politically the Civil War was the only mechanism that could have happened that could have ended enslavement. There was no sign in 1860 that slavery was ending. In fact, slavery and profits were at an all time high. There was no sign that Southern states were going to relent and stop spreading slavery into the West. In fact, they had every reason to continue spreading it into the West. And there was no indication that the Southern states would not have designs on spreading slavery and the American empire into Central and South America.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So the Civil War was something that ended slavery decisively, and that was a long time coming. I would say in terms of emancipation, emancipation really didn't start to come about until a century later, I would say in the 1960s, because you have this very entrenched system of racial hierarchy in the United States, but specifically in the post-Civil War South, in which that old Southern idea that enslavement is natural, that Black people are naturally meant to be servers of white people, that Black people are naturally not as intelligent as white people, that Black people are actually not fit to be involved in politics. That really carries over definitely into today, but definitely up through the 1960s. The whole argument over whether Black men should be given the right to vote in the 1870s hinges on this notion.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

The whole idea on whether Black people should be compensated and receive reparations for slavery begins in the 1860s and is not entirely resolved. And so I would say emancipation, I think we need to look at emancipation as this long process. Definitely slavery itself is outlawed and ended constitutionally in 1865, but slavery itself takes on different forms until it's formally no longer enshrined in law in the 1960s.

Attributing emancipation correctly

01:45:04:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So is Lincoln the great emancipator? I think Lincoln is the political vehicle through which emancipation was enacted on a political and legal footing. In terms of Lincoln himself, a man, being the one who freed the slaves, I would say historical evidence would say no.

In terms of people who should be exalted, I would say looking into the ways in which Black communities themselves responded to that moment of when the shots are fired in Fort Sumter, we have a lot of stories of people like Robert Smalls, who was an African-American man enslaved in South Carolina. He basically stole a ship and surrendered to the Union and then became a defector to the Union who helped the Union discover pathways into the Confederate South. Harriet Tubman, another one who's working as an armed resistor in South Carolina. Definitely the Black women who went into the South as the Civil War occurred to educate newly freed or free people in the South.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so I think it requires us really reconceptualizing what the Civil War was and reconceptualizing what slavery was. If we put African-American people at the center of slavery in the United States, it makes it difficult to argue that somehow a single politician is elected and slavery ends. Again, that's not to say that Lincoln did nothing for the country. In fact politically, he is the vehicle through which slavery ends, but how does that happen? And that begs the question of how then we look at any type of movement that causes profound social, political, and economic shift. It might mean that a lot of times that happens not based on who is elected, although that person becomes a conduit for the will of what the people want, but that it's the people themselves who end up forcing that politician, forcing their hand in a more liberatory way.

Black equality

01:47:18:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Well, I think that if you were to look at many white Southerners, the answer would be no. If you were to look at African-Americans themselves, and even if you were to look at some white people right when slavery ends and the plantocracy is being dismantled in 1860s, who did believe that there was a place for a true democracy in the United States, that those were mostly Black people, but also there were people who believed that this had to happen. I'm thinking of Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stephens, people who by the late 1860s were really committed to the idea that Black people needed the right to vote, they needed land, but definitely Black people themselves foresaw a future. And one of the best things to do is look at old newspapers and look at what freed people were saying about the country.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And they're very, very optimistic from roughly 1865 to roughly 1875, because as violent as Reconstruction was, as much as the future was uncertain, they really had seen that they had been promised that the country was going to have this rebirth, and they really believed that that was true. And they really saw that almost come to fruition, right? So they're seeing for the first time schools appear in the South where the South didn't have a very vigorous public school system for anybody who was not a slave holder. They see the first set of African-American office holders elected to office. They see African-Americans suddenly allowed and moving. When they're being attacked by whites, they moved to Oklahoma Territory. They moved to Kansas, picking up and creating their own towns. Black women now being able to decide whether or not they want to have children, to the extent that women could decide in 1860s. But this is a big step.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

And just this notion that if you read what freed people were saying in that 10-year period after the Civil War, really seeing that democracy was on the horizon. The most heartbreaking thing about that is that we know that that wasn't the case. But if you were around at the time, most African-American people, particularly people who were formerly enslaved, there's a sense that it can happen. So they keep on voting. They keep on enrolling their children in school. They keep on demanding that they get school and mutual aid societies, and that they're allowed to purchase property and all these types of things. And they wouldn't do that if they believed that it was hopeless and that there was no place for them in the society. So yes, I would say that Black people definitely believed that there was a place, with some exceptions, but mostly yes.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

I would say that there's even a small, albeit very small, group of white radical Republicans who did have a vision that the federal government would represent people based on consent of the governed, right? And that there's this period reconstruction where there were people who had that ideal. That didn't necessarily last, but they had it for a period of time before because Reconstruction began to collapse.

The Gettysburg Address

01:50:41:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So the Gettysburg Address is one of those things that spoke to this idea of union and this idea that the massive destruction that took place in the Civil War was not something that was going to be in vain and that there was going to be this new rebirth of freedom, which was one of the words that he uses towards the end. The thing about the Gettysburg Address is that it became a

way that Lincoln articulated a way of hoping that many particularly white Northerners were not feeling at the time. And many Black Northerners, although they were looking at the Civil War as something that was this cataclysmic redemptive moment, it hadn't been articulated by somebody in power. And so that becoming a very powerful notion that America was at a precipice, but all the death and destruction was not something that was going to be in vain.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And that actually there could be something that would be born from it. And that that would be the new birth of freedom became a rallying cry amongst many Black intellectuals and Black politicians later on, because they would point at this as saying this was a sign that there was this new rebirth. And so particularly if we get into how did Black people see themselves having a place in the future of the country, Gettysburg address didn't give them that. But it definitely articulated that notion that there was a future beyond the terrible moment that is the Civil War.

The 13th Amendment

01:52:33:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So the 13th Amendment was passed in 1865. It says that slavery, involuntary servitude could not exist in the United States. The caveat in there is except for in punishment for a crime. And so it is monumental, but it also was something that became a loophole that people who were not hopeful about the emancipation of Black people could use to their advantage. So the monumental thing about the 13th Amendment is that it says that slavery and involuntary servitude cannot exist in the United States. So if we think that slavery begins in the early 17th century, this is now 1865, that's over 250

years of slavery. It's saying that that can no longer be. That in of itself is a glorious testament to the idea behind the Amendment. The idea, however, that enslavement itself is still something that can be practiced if somebody is quote-unquote guilty. It's something that we're still haunted by today in terms of the legacy of the 13th Amendment.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

The fact that that little caveat in there changed the way that law and justice were conducted in the South and in the United States and led to this history of mass incarceration that we have in the United States. In terms of when slavery ended though, for African-American people themselves, the 13th Amendment marked this turning point, right, where you finally had enslavement itself being considered something that was not viable and being written into the American Constitution and that therefore the United States was something that was no longer a slave holding society. It had the potential to actually be a society that could institute freedom and justice for everyone. In terms of when slavery actually ends, a state like Mississippi didn't specifically ratify the 13th Amendment until very recently.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So we have to look at the 13th Amendment as this watershed moment in terms of African-American people, but also a way in which racism and white supremacy can shift, and adapt to the new ideals that take place. And so the fact that white Southerners adapted to this notion of, except for in punishment for a crime, doesn't mean that the 13th Amendment should be thrown out. It means that it shows the power in which white supremacy can adapt to a new form. And it then means that there has to be a reassessment and a reconsideration of what the 13th Amendment actually means.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

So in order for a Constitutional Amendment in the United States, you have to have two-thirds of the states have to ratify it. And so the 13th Amendment and the 14th and 15th Amendment, which come after it go to the States for ratification between 1865 and 1870. And a majority of the States as they existed, signed on to those. But if you were a slave holding state and you had a convention and you didn't sign on to it, but two-thirds of the States did, it meant that that became a Constitutional Amendment, but you as a state didn't sign it. So Mississippi was a state that never signed the 13th Amendment. Given the way in the history of the South of the country, didn't sign it up until very recently when the state legislature in Mississippi formally apologized for not signing it and agreed to sign it in the past few years.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So there's that kind of deep strain of white supremacists and pro-slavery thought that still exists in parts of the country, but in terms of African-American people being legally enslaved, we know that the convict leasing system that developed after the Civil War was a way in which African-American rights could be curtailed, because you could send somebody to prison and they can then technically work for your company. And so, I think one of the things as historians and as people who are curious about this history to do is look at how systems morph into the systems that we experience today. So, right, slavery does not exist. It's not even to say that we are living in a time that is like slavery, because I think that's not true, but it's to say that the systems in which we live tend to morph into something else, unless there's a concerted effort to continue to agitate, to make sure that they don't morph into what the country was built upon.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so the 13th Amendment ended slavery. African-American people recognize it ended slavery for all intents and purposes. America recognizes that it ended slavery, but unless you stamp out and find very concrete ways to

ensure that those who do not want to preserve emancipation, ensure that those people are not making the policy, it's very hard to ensure that that will become the reality that people wanted it to in 1865.

The assassination of Abraham Lincoln

01:58:04:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

John Wilkes Booth came up in a very famous acting family. Often when I think of the assassination of Lincoln, I think of it would be akin to today if a president were assassinated by somebody who people saw on reality TV. It was that type of relationship between Lincoln and this person who was a secessionist who believed in the cause of the Confederacy. John Wilkes Booth, there had been designs against Lincoln going all the way back to 1861 and where they emerged in Baltimore. And he goes to Ford's Theater for this performance. And he was assassinated again in front of his wife and the Lincoln family having all these terrible tragedies that occur in the span of four or five years. And when he was assassinated, there were initially reports that Lincoln had survived or that he was going to survive. And then very famously, of course, he's taken to his chambers. And the statement is he's now one with the ages, that he had died.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so really for Americans at the time, the fact that a President could be assassinated and that a President could be assassinated by somebody who, particularly in the North, many people thought they knew casually because he was an actor and the Booth family was an acting family, was something that was very tragic. It was doubly tragic because at the time, there weren't a lot of mechanisms in place to decide what would happen to the Lincoln family. So Mary Todd Lincoln, once her husband was assassinated, she leaves

the White House and she enters a period where she doesn't have a lot of money, she's completely alienated from other members- who were part of her husband's Cabinet.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so it was like just a changing of the guard, whereas nowadays we know of course that former heads of state have certain levels of protection once they leave office, their families have certain levels of protection. So that was a monumental moment, just from a human level and a personal level. In terms of the Civil War, it creates Lincoln as a martyr within the American imagination. It shifts the way that many African-Americans viewed him, even though he had a lot of critics, say Frederick Douglass and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, the fact that he was assassinated changes, alters the way that African-American people remember him and remember him as a President.

02:00:58:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

The other thing that happens, though, is that when he ran for office again in 1864, and again, we have to think that it was not a foregone conclusion that he would win reelection. He wins and he replaced his running mate with Andrew Johnson, who was a non-slaveholding white man from Tennessee, a unionist, but a virulent white supremacist. And so there was a lot of doubt amongst many in the Republican Party that Andrew Johnson was going to be able to carry forth Lincoln's vision. And we know that there were plans in Lincoln's vision to propose or support additional legislation, an additional amendment that would provide citizenship for African-Americans. So we know that that was what was mulling around in his brain and in his focus. He is inaugurated and then he is assassinated a few weeks later. So the fact that now the replacement, the Vice President is going to be President, and that that Vice President was Andrew Johnson, was devastating to many

abolitionists and many Republicans, because many of them recognized that there was no way Johnson was going to carry forth this vision.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Lincoln might have been anti-slavery and might have questioned Black equality, and might have been somebody who up until 1862 proposed colonization, but there wasn't any evidence that he was an Andrew Johnson who fundamentally believed that slavery hurt white people more than Black people. And that what needed to happen was that white people needed to be brought back to the country under all former terms, except they couldn't be slaveholders, which was not a lot of imagination, not a lot of foresight into what that would actually look like.

02:02:57:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

And so the fact Lincoln's assassination, I would say was a devastating in terms of the project of emancipation that could have happened, even though Lincoln's conceptualization of emancipation was limited. The fact that Andrew Johnson replaced him was devastating to African-Americans across the South, right? The only good thing that came from that is that it led the radical Republican wing of the Republican Party to really take control of radical Reconstruction and argue for the 14th Amendment, which gave citizenship to African Americans and all people born in the United States except Native Americans and the 15th Amendment. So it galvanized radical Republicans, but in terms of the lives lost on this devastation caused by Andrew Johnson's Presidency was unprecedented at the time.

The myths of Lincoln's presidency

02:03:59:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

I think the biggest thing that comes to mind is this notion that somehow Lincoln was a racial egalitarian and that he foresaw the country that we know happens at the end of the Civil War. And so I think there's often this notion and mythmaking about heroes that somehow they knew something that nobody else in their time knew. Sometimes that might be true, but most of that time, that isn't necessarily true. They are a person working in their time and we just know what happens after them. So did Lincoln fully understand what the implications were of African-American emancipation? He had a vision of what he wanted it to be, particularly in the last months of his life, but in terms of what did that mean for African-American land ownership and economics and education? And what did that mean in terms of discipline for the South that then returned to the Union and had all of these violent reactions to African-Americans being free? He didn't really envision that.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

So I think in terms of the myths about Lincoln, we have to take it from the perspective that he didn't foresee what we often think he might have foreseen as President. I also would hesitate though that we shouldn't argue that somehow Lincoln didn't matter, because elections matter in the United States, as much as we can argue and it's certainly true that the ways that they matter indicate that the system is broken in a certain way. Who was President at the time in 1861 fundamentally changed the course of the country and the course of African-American and African diasporic life. And so the fact that he was President, if he had not been President then, what would have happened to enslavement? It's a thought that, would it have ended then or would it have taken another 30 years, another 20 years, like it happened in Brazil? Would it have lasted throughout the end of the 19th century? We don't know, but he's a man who was essential. His politics were essential to become, again, the conduit for the liberation that African-American people deserved.

The abolitionist movement after the Civil War

02:06:30:00

KERRI GREENIDGE:

I would say that the abolitionist movement itself was driven by Black people in Black communities. And that that's where a lesson for future fights against inequity and white supremacist violence can come from, which is that the best abolitionist practice in the 19th century in the United States was when African-American communities themselves defined the parameters of what liberation looks like. And then white people were able to help them achieve that. And so that's a very powerful thing to learn from this moment. And I think it's a very powerful thing that can inform the 20th century Civil Rights movement, current-day struggles against racial injustice.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

In terms of the abolitionist movement as a movement that was inherently anti-racist, it would depend on who you were talking to in the abolitionist movement. Someone like a Wendell Phillips, who was an orator and anti-slavery activist from Massachusetts, he definitely was somebody who believed fundamentally that African-American people were equal and that they deserved not just rights in the United States, but compensation for their labor. And he was somebody who, Wendell Phillips would indicate he gets a lot of that by listening to and interacting with the Black community.

KERRI GREENIDGE:

Somebody like a William Lloyd Garrison, once the Civil War ended, tended to do what a large group of white abolitionists did, which was that they really saw slavery ended, Black people had been delivered to emancipation. And so Garrison literally closed up *The Liberator* and basically said we're no longer going to publish because our work is done. That approach for many

African-American people and for many people who were more radical, struck them as not engaging with what abolition really was supposed to mean, which was that not just that you were ending slavery, but that you were recreating and creating a racially egalitarian, representative democratic government. And so there would be criticism that way.

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KERRI GREENIDGE:

I would say though, that one of the things that is inspiring is that the abolitionist movement ended up forcing many white Americans who didn't really think about slavery because they didn't live in a slave society. It pushed many of those people, not the majority by any means, but push many of those people to reimagine what the country would look like, which I think is a good lesson that activists can have now, is that it is still possible that Black communities themselves protest, they end up creating a cultural protest and that that cultural protest, it can't be the only thing, but it does have the power to completely change the way somebody looks at and conceptualizes the world in which they live. And so that's the most powerful lesson from the abolitionist movement.

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