

Film Clips Transcript

Clip One: A Welcoming Physical Geograpy

Chris Bonner: And so I think that when we take down Confederate monuments, what we do is eradicate that history of white supremacy that has been placed on the landscape not only in the South, but across the country.

[TEXT ON SCREEN]

NEW ORLEANS, LA
1900

NEW ORLEANS, LA
2017

RICHMOND, VA
1890

RICHMOND, VA
2021

Chris Bonner: It's a good project to make the physical geography of the nation available and accessible and welcoming to American people.

Narration: In 1922, Abraham Lincoln was memorialized with his own monument in Washington, D.C. But unlike the Confederate statues that were erected after the Civil War, every inch of it was designed to reinforce Americans' common bond.

David Reynolds: The Lincoln Memorial was a symbol of unity. It has 36 columns, representing the 36 states in 1865. There's Georgia marble. There's Massachusetts granite. Alabama marble in the ceiling. So, bringing formerly hostile sections together.

Jelani Cobb: There's an inclination to seek out Lincoln in trying times. That Abraham Lincoln had to be smuggled into Washington, D.C. under threat of his life ahead of inauguration. And we saw an inauguration in 2021 of an American president in which the city was occupied by 20,000 National Guard troops to protect the life of the incoming president. We've seen the accusations of elections that are thought to have not been representative. And, you know, all of these dynamics that are extremely dangerous in a democracy. And in that moment, you think about the first president who was tasked with navigating that kind of situation in the crucible of major conflict – and it's Lincoln.

to come to prominence within the Republican Party.

Clip Two: Remembering Our History

WASHINGTON, D.C.

January 20, 2021

Amanda Gorman, v/o from inaugural poem, The Hill We Climb:

*being American is more than a pride we inherit,
it's the past we step into
and how we repair it*

*We've seen a force that would shatter our nation
rather than share it*

*Would destroy our country if it meant delaying
democracy*

And this effort very nearly succeeded

Narration: In his goal to save the Union, Lincoln was unwavering. Obsessive. Imperfect. Sometimes ahead of his time, and inevitably well behind ours. So the question falls to each new generation: How should Abraham Lincoln be remembered?

Edward Widmer: The "Great Emancipator." Today, we are uncomfortable with the idea of saviors, especially white male saviors. It just feels hollow after so much injustice.

Jelani Cobb: There's been a need for a redemptive vision of how the country handled slavery. And so, in focusing on Lincoln as the grand emancipator, it allowed the United States, and more specifically allowed white people to emphasize the way that slavery ended without thinking about the ways in which slavery was created in this country and the ways in which it endured.

Kellie Carter Jackson: I think [Lincoln] reminds us how much struggle, how much activism how much leadership is required to make these monumental transformative changes that we all live in right now. You don't just stumble upon emancipation. People fought for that. Emancipation does not die with Lincoln. Freedom was never about Lincoln – it's so much bigger than that.

Eric Foner: I do not want to denigrate Lincoln's role in changing the nature of the Union war effort from preserving the Union to [ending slavery]. That was a crucial change. But in and of itself, it certainly did not guarantee that slavery would end. To end an institution [like slavery], it's not just a question of emancipating individual people. It's destroying a very deeply entrenched institution, and that required the action of everybody.

Lincoln, v/o: *Let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man – this race and that race and the other race being inferior. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal.*