

## Film Clip Transcripts

### Clip One: Before the Presidency

**Eric Foner:** Lincoln is always evolving in the sense that he's a very open-minded person. He is not stuck in his ways. He's aware that, in a crisis like this, old ideas may no longer be relevant.

**Narration:** Lincoln clung to his tightrope. He would try to coax the still-loyal border states to give up slavery voluntarily, but if he pushed too hard they might defect. Lose them, he believed, and he would lose the war.

**Edna Greene Medford:** He knows that the Confederacy, those states are lost. That they're gone. Those 11 are gone out of the Union, but he doesn't want to do anything to upset the four that are still in the Union.

**Lincoln, v/o:** *I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. . . . We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this capital.*

**Edna Greene Medford:** He started pressuring – perhaps that's too strong a word – encouraging, the border states that, if they started to end slavery on their own, then the Confederacy would understand that it would never get any larger and they might come to their senses and return to the Union.

**Michael Burlingame:** In March of 1862, he puts forward this proposal. He says, "Let's have the Congress appropriate money to be given to any state whose government abolishes slavery. And let's adopt gradual emancipation. And let's also make part of the package colonization." That is any Blacks who want to leave shall have government support and we will try to find a haven or refuge for those people who voluntarily want to leave.

**Narration:** For years, many Northern politicians had linked their anti-slavery support with the idea of colonization.

Freed American slaves would be convinced to return to Africa or the Caribbean. The message was: You should be free. Just, not here.

**Eric Foner:** This was always the question when you talked about abolishing slavery. Well, what is going to happen to these emancipated slaves? Are they going to remain in the United States? Are they going to be citizens? What kind of rights are they going to have, if any?

The fact that Lincoln promoted this idea of colonization for about ten years doesn't fit with a lot of people's image of Lincoln. Let's just put it that way. The "Great Emancipator." But I think you have to take Lincoln at his word. Lincoln did believe in this plan. It is part of a plan for getting rid of slavery.

**Lincoln, v/o:** *If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia – to their own native land. But a moment's reflection would convince me, that whatever of high hope there may be in this, its sudden execution is impossible. What then?... Free them, and make them politically and socially our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not.*

**Kellie Carter Jackson:** Lincoln does not want slavery, but that does not necessarily mean that he wants Black people to be free, or that he wants black people to be enfranchised, or that he wants Black people to be seen as equal.

**Edna Greene Medford:** Lincoln understood his people and understood the challenges they would have in accepting Black people as free. The problem was, though, his solution was remove Black people, not try to talk your people into understanding that Black people had a right to be in this country because Black people built the country.

### Clip Two: Influenced by Enslaved People

**Narration:** Lincoln wouldn't allow fugitive slaves to enlist in the Union Army. But a trio of enslaved men began to force his hand on emancipation.

**Michael Burlingame:** The question of what to do with fugitive slaves who came to Union lines was raised very early in the war, in the spring of 1861 when three slaves come to Fort Monroe at the confluence of the York and James rivers, a huge Union fortification.

**John Cooper:** Frank Baker, James Townsend, and Shepard Mallory are building fortifications near Fort Monroe. They know that they are going to be moved south. And the Union is right there. They get in a boat under cover of darkness and they row to Fort Monroe and they take their chances.

**Narration:** The commander at Fort Monroe, General Benjamin Butler, had no official policy to guide him on what to do with escapees.

**Michael Burlingame:** Benjamin Butler says, "Come on in." Well, the next day, the slave owner says, "There is this statute called the Fugitive Slave Law that says you're obliged to return the fugitive slaves to me." And Benjamin Butler, very clever, is a lawyer, says, "Ahem, the Fugitive Slave Act applies to the United States. You claim that you're no longer members of the United States, and

therefore, we're not going to return these slaves to you."

**Narration:** Butler's order placed the matter of fugitives squarely in Lincoln's lap. Rather than force the escapees back into bondage, Lincoln supported his major general.

**Chris Bonner:** Contraband comes to be the term under which enslaved African Americans were named. It was what they were called throughout the Civil War.

**Lonnie Bunch:** In some ways, contraband is a horrible word, but it's almost an appropriate word because they were not seen as human. They were really seen as property to fulfill the needs of the country.

**Narration:** Word spread, and within weeks hundreds of escapees streamed into Fort Monroe, setting up a large "contraband" camp just outside its gates.

Soon, contraband camps popped up all over the upper South.

**Lonnie Bunch:** There were literally hundreds of contraband camps around the country. As the self-emancipated came to cities that were now under the control of the Union, people didn't know what to do with them, and they put them in these camps. What you have is a place that is both ripe with hope and optimism, but also ripe with disease, death, and frustration.

**Harriet Jacobs, v/o:** *I found men, women, and children all huddled together without any regard to age or sex. Some of them were in the most pitiable condition.// Amid all this sadness, we sometimes would hear a shout of joy. Some mother had come in and found her long-lost child; some husband his wife.*

**Edna Greene Medford:** I have no doubt Lincoln is very much influenced by the contraband that he sees in Washington on a daily basis. When he's coming from the Soldiers' Home to the White House, he's passing down Seventh Street and he's passing one of those contraband camps and they are greeting him as he goes by.

**Lonnie Bunch:** And there are many stories of Lincoln stopping to talk, learning about what it was like to be a Black woman who was enslaved. So in some ways, this notion of Lincoln having a thirst to understand something he didn't experience, but having the kind of compassion to talk to people who were enslaved, I think that also began to shape him because what it does is it makes slavery real.

**Narration:** The humanity of the escapees moved Lincoln. And as their numbers grew, so did his resolve to use emancipation as a means of ending the war.

**Edward Ayers:** Part of what Lincoln sees is that we have these powerful allies in the enslaved population, who can be spies, who can tell us exactly which road to follow when we're mobilizing, who can help our own troops. And by aiding us, you're hurting the enemy. So Lincoln sees this, you know, these words, these reports come up to Washington and he begins to realize that perhaps the way to do what he took office to do, which is to save the United States, goes through ending slavery, not around ending slavery.

**Kellie Carter Jackson:** So in order to bring the country together, again, he has to have emancipation. And this is how emancipation becomes not just a military necessity, but a political necessity.