

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Diana Schaub

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I: Douglass's Life and Ideas (0:15 – 33:47)

KRISTOL: Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm Bill Kristol and I'm pleased today to be joined by an old friend, Diana Schaub, professor of political science at Loyola University, Maryland. Author, years ago, of an excellent book on Montesquieu, on the *Persian Letters*. You've turned your attention more in recent years – you still do political philosophy – but to American things.

And the co-editor of a terrific anthology with Amy Kass and Leon Kass, *What So Proudly We Hail*, which people should buy. And there's a website where you can find poetry, speeches, fiction about America. I particularly like the holiday – it's organized by holidays. So, for July 4th, you can read July 4th appropriate material. So thank you for doing that. It's excellent. And thank you for joining me today.

SCHAUB: Glad to be here.

KRISTOL: And we're talking about Frederick Douglass, who you've written on, very interestingly. So you should tell us about Frederick Douglass. Donald Trump, actually, gave Frederick Douglass some publicity.

SCHAUB: A little plug. [Laughter]

KRISTOL: I wanted to have this conversation before Donald Trump reminded the world of Frederick Douglass's existence, which I think he did in February. Right? When he said – I wrote it down. He said, "Frederick Douglass is an example of somebody who's done an amazing job and is getting the recognition more and more, I notice." Still unclear that the president knows exactly who he is, but do you agree with that?

SCHAUB: Yeah. He led an amazing life. And he could still be doing good work today. In other words, Donald Trump could be right. If we spent more time reading Frederick Douglass, reading his speeches and writings, his autobiography, a little more attention to his life and achievements, would mean that we could say he's doing good work and getting more attention for it.

KRISTOL: So this conversation will vindicate the President, so that's good. [Laughter] No, I mean, I myself had a vaguely, of course, favorable view of Frederick Douglass, you know. Very impressive man, escaped from slavery and all. But I had no idea of the depth of his thought and the complexity of his statesmanship, I guess we could call it, until I began to study it a little bit when I taught a year or two in

American Political Thought. And then really read your work, and the work of one or two others, I guess. Did Herbert Storing write on –

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: – on Douglass decades ago.

SCHAUB: Storing wrote a book, a collection called *What Country Have I?* And that phrase actually comes from Frederick Douglass. It's on one of his speeches where he reflects on whether it's possible for a slave or a freed black in America before the Civil War to be a patriot. And he poses that question: *What country have I?* And Douglass says he feels like he has all of the emotional equipment to be a patriot if he could reconcile himself to his country.

So, I mean, in a way, part of the value, I think, of Frederick Douglass is that he shows how one can develop an intelligent patriotism, and how one can think about the Founding. I mean, for part of him becoming a patriot is his revisiting the Founding, revisiting the Constitution. He has a kind of evolving view of the Founding and the Constitution.

KRISTOL: Okay, we can walk through that. But when I talked – I just cribbed some stories which the students hadn't read, so that was how I was a successful professor in my first year of being a professor. But now I can crib from your essays. So it would be even better. Okay, so walk us through Frederick Douglass. Say a word about who he was and when he lived.

SCHAUB: Well, we don't know the exact date of his birth. Like most slaves, there was no record of his birthday. And he talks about what that means, to not have that part of your identity. But he's – we now know born around 1819, born as a slave in Maryland on Maryland's Eastern Shore. We could talk a little bit about what he's –

KRISTOL: So he gives an account of his experience as a youth.

SCHAUB: Once he successfully flees from slavery, he writes the narrative.

KRISTOL: And he flees when he's what? A teenager?

SCHAUB: He's about 20 or so when he finally escapes.

KRISTOL: So he spends his youth as a slave.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Teaches himself, as I recall, to read and write?

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: It's an amazing story. Right?

SCHAUB: He's obviously a remarkable individual from the beginning. So he hears his master raging that, you know, if a slave learns to read, that would forever unfit him for slavery. And he says it's from that moment that he understood the direct pathway from slavery to freedom. So he had already been receiving a little bit of instruction from his mistress who was a kind-hearted woman who had never had a slave before. And he expressed an interest in books and she started to instruct him and then the master intervenes. So interestingly, he says he thinks –

KRISTOL: Intervenes to stop him.

SCHAUB: Intervenes to stop the lessons. And he says that he thinks he owes as much to that proscription from the master as from the kindness of the mistress.

KRISTOL: Why? Because it –

SCHAUB: Because it made clear to him what the sort of foundation of white power was. It was the denial of education to blacks.

KRISTOL: So he escapes from slavery –

SCHAUB: Well, he first, you know, frees his mind from ignorance by learning to read. He kind of tricks his white playmates into sharing the secrets of the alphabet with him. His master turns out to be right, his acquisition of literacy makes him sullen, makes him aware, even more aware of the wrongs that are being done to him. He gets hold of a copy of a book called the *Columbian Orator*, which is a collection of great speeches from, you know, Englishmen, Americans, the celebration of liberty, and he masters all of that material.

KRISTOL: That was an important book around the Founding. Right?

SCHAUB: Yeah, it would have been a book that would have been used in classrooms.

KRISTOL: So that's how he got it, presumably.

SCHAUB: Kind of a primer.

KRISTOL: So that's amazing. So he begins by reading these speeches of George Washington or Edmond Burke or whoever. Right?

SCHAUB: Yeah. But he becomes increasingly sullen as an adolescent, and his master eventually hires him out to a man who was known as a slave breaker. That's what you did with truculent youngsters; you had to break their spirits. And so he's farmed out for a year to work with this fellow Edward Covey. And this is really the first time in Douglass's life that he's been exposed to the sort of full rigors of being a field hand and exposed to the lash, regular whippings. And he says, "I was becoming a brute." He was being brutified by it.

But a particularly terrible beating kind of recalls him to himself, and he resolves to resist the next time Covey comes at him; he's not going to allow himself to be whipped. So he's about 16 at this point. Remember, he's a big fellow. He's six-foot four.

KRISTOL: Wow. That is big.

SCHAUB: Incredibly strong and impressive physical person. And he engages in a two hour hand-to-hand fight with Covey. And even there you could see his sort of prudence: he doesn't go on the offensive. He simply fends Covey off, but that could entail, you know, holding him by the neck and refusing to be caught hold of.

Douglass wins that battle in the sense that Covey was unable to get hold of him and unable to whip him. And Douglass was never whipped thereafter. And Douglass has this remarkable reflection on what that meant. He says, "From that moment forward" – because of the spirit that rose within him – he said, "I was a free man in fact, though I still remained a slave in form."

So, I mean, I think reading Douglass can really let us know something about what freedom really means: that it is a spiritual condition as much as a physical condition.

KRISTOL: Now this is in a narrative. I mean, there are latter versions, but this is what he writes pretty soon after he becomes free. Right?

SCHAUB: Well, yeah, within a few years. I mean, when he's 20 he escapes from slavery. He goes to New Bedford, Massachusetts, sort of gets hooked up with the radical abolitionists, with the Garrisonian abolitionists. He eventually becomes an agent for the Garrisonians on the lecture circuit, you know, kind of telling about the horrors of slavery. And his development as a speaker is so rapid, his learning becomes so deep and profound that people begin to question whether such an individual could really ever have been a slave or not.

KRISTOL: Is that right? I didn't know that.

SCHAUB: Because usually what the former – you know, they were recruited for the abolitionist lecture circuit, and what they were expected to do was kind of show your scars and talk about the horrors of slavery. And, in fact, his sort of white mentors instructed him “Better have a little of the plantation speech. It is not best that you seem too learned.” So Douglass starts to chafe at the paternalism there.

But in a sense, some of the abolitionists' concerns were confirmed because people began doubting that Douglass had ever been a slave. So he actually writes the narrative in order to prove his *bona fides*, yeah.

KRISTOL: And that's around 1845, I think, something like that.

SCHAUB: Yeah. So he names names. He names his former master. Remember, he's a fugitive slave; that leaves him exposed to recapture.

KRISTOL: So even when you've gone to the freed states, you aren't safe entirely.

SCHAUB: He's exposed to recapture, so he actually leaves the country. He spends two years in England, rallying international sentiment against slavery. While he's abroad, English friends purchase his freedom for him; they contact the old family and arrange for Douglass to become a free man. His friends, the Garrisonian abolitionists, objected to that, because that makes one complicit in slavery. You're acting as if someone really did own Frederick Douglass.

KRISTOL: Never even thought of that. I mean, I've read that story, about them buying his freedom. Now the Garrisonian abolitionists, I mean, they are, so their point of view is abolition of slavery, obviously. But I mean –

SCHAUB: But calling for an immediate end to slavery and doing so through the reform of the individual conscience. So the Garrisonians rejected any kind of political action for the reason that the federal compact, the Constitution, was a tainted document, tainted by the original compromise with slavery and therefore it ought to be annulled. No person of good conscience could consent to hold office under it; no person of good conscience could even consent to vote under the Constitution.

They went so far with this as to say that even if by your one vote slavery would be overturned, it would be illegitimate to cast that vote. So the Garrisonians show an extreme concern for the purity of the individual conscience. They want no contamination with slavery; no compromise with slave holders. And they called for the annulment of the Constitution.

KRISTOL: And so Douglass is speaking as part of this movement. So it's sort of a proselytizing – I mean, it's not religious exactly, but proselytizing movement in the sense that that there's no actual political agenda to pass this law.

SCHAUB: Yeah, there's no party, there's no political party, nothing like that. So Douglass is a faithful Garrisonian for a number of years. But after he comes back from England, he resolves to launch out on his own. He relocates from Massachusetts to New York, to Rochester, New York, and he founds a newspaper, *The North Star*, that will be entirely run by an African American.

He thinks it's important that African Americans take the lead in the abolition struggle. And once he sort of relocated, and maybe also because he's not quite so thrilled that the Garrisonians weren't happy about the purchase of his freedom, I think he begins to think some of the tactics of the abolition struggle –

He also comes in touch with the Liberty Party, which is located, centered in New York. They were political action abolitionists. They believed that you could work through the political system for the reform of slavery. And that difference really hinged on the evaluation of the Constitution. So the Garrisonians read the Constitution as a pro-slavery document, in the same way that the Calhounites and the Southern "Slaveocrats" did. And the political-action abolitionists read the Constitution as an anti-slavery document. So Douglass then throws himself into that debate.

KRISTOL: And this is literally a party, the Liberty Party?

SCHAUB: That is a party.

KRISTOL: It's the third party.

SCHAUB: Yeah. So he – it really is quite fascinating. I mean, he spends a two-year period really struggling with this issue, of what's the right way to read a text. And he sort of invites the Liberty Party men, well, *tell me about your rules of reading, you know. I want to understand how to approach a text. Can we really understand this as an anti-slavery document or not?*

KRISTOL: And he has to go back and look at – I guess they have the records of the federal convention at that point, but maybe not quite. But the *Federalist Papers* certainly.

SCHAUB: Yeah, although the position that he comes to of following Lysander Spooner is that you don't consult those outside sources. It is the text and only the text.

KRISTOL: I guess a real originalist or whatever, textualist, I guess.

SCHAUB: Yeah. So he's eventually persuaded that this is the correct interpretation. And I think his reason for switching is not the –

KRISTOL: And what's the *this* there?

SCHAUB: That the Constitution is an anti-slavery document.

KRISTOL: Which made – which made reluctant compromises with slavery. I mean –

SCHAUB: Yeah. Actually, the Spooner position is that there are no compromises with slavery in the document. So Spooner reads the absence of the word *slave* or *slavery* from the text as an indication that it's not there. And so, if you take a passage like the three-fifths clause or what we call "the fugitive-slave clause," Spooner said, no, it doesn't refer to slaves it refers either to resident aliens. Or the fugitive-slave clause refers to indentured servants who've signed a contract, and if they skip out on that contract they can be obliged, they can be returned to their overseers.

So Douglass, I think, is interesting, because he doesn't go down that, completely down that route. He is prepared to admit that there are some prudential compromises with slavery in the text. But through a kind

of discriminating interpretation of the Founders' intent, he believes that they did not accord any moral sanction to the idea that there could be property in man.

So, for instance, about the three-fifths clause, he argues that what that actually does is to deprive the southern states of two-fifths of their natural basis of representation.

KRISTOL: The full population.

SCHAUB: Which would just be – the full population. And remember, free blacks were counted in full. The distinction is not a racial distinction between black and white; it's a distinction between slave and free.

KRISTOL: So it prevents the south from having more power.

SCHAUB: From having more power than it otherwise would if you had gone by the natural standard.

KRISTOL: It's funny – today – isn't it? I mean, people just use the three-fifths clause as a talking point almost. See it's –

SCHAUB: Yeah, a denial of black humanity.

KRISTOL: Right. But as a practical matter, it was the most they could do to make it more likely that slavery would be limited, I suppose, or reduce the political power, in any case, of the states that were already slave states.

SCHAUB: Yeah, so there again going back to Douglass and he then, you know, writes these speeches: *Is the U.S. Constitution pro-slavery or anti-slavery?* And he takes you through all of the passages and gives you the analysis. So it's a great resource.

KRISTOL: And this is happening that the early 1850s?

SCHAUB: Yeah, most of that writing about the Constitution would be during that time. And a final, sort of summative statement in 1860 that he makes on the Constitution.

KRISTOL: And meanwhile in American politics there's the Compromise of 1850 and then Dred Scott and all this. So, the political dynamic is going the other way, I guess one would say.

SCHAUB: Going south, yeah.

KRISTOL: Going south so to speak, yes.

SCHAUB: Very quickly, yeah. And Douglass, you know, of course, is denouncing all of those things. But there's also that there's always this side of Douglass – you can see it in his reaction to the statement from his master about, you know, "you shall not learn to read." Douglass takes all of that heightening of the conflict as positive, in a way. Because he believes it will hasten the day in which the end of slavery will come.

KRISTOL: And he's a major figure at this point, or pretty major?

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I mean, well known.

SCHAUB: As an orator, he is the favorite of the day. I mean, this is a time when Americans had a nearly gluttonous appetite for oratory.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: There were no screens, there were no other forms of entertainment; you know, a three-hour speech would be fairly routine. Think of the Lincoln/Douglas debates; that's the other Douglas, Stephen Douglas. So, yeah, Frederick Douglass was immensely popular, and he went on speaking tours throughout the nation – in many places, of course, encountering resistance or mobs.

KRISTOL: And he meets other political leaders and so forth? Or not so much? Or it's more like a separate –

SCHAUB: Maybe not so much, because the abolitionists are quite radical.

KRISTOL: Right. I guess he can't go to Washington.

SCHAUB: And he's not within party politics. That changes a bit during the war itself when he has –

KRISTOL: So in the '50s –

SCHAUB: – when he has meetings with Lincoln.

KRISTOL: In the '50s, Lincoln is leading the opposition to *Dredd Scott*, and there's the debates with Douglas.

SCHAUB: Yeah, the Republican Party is born. Yeah, Lincoln begins to come to the fore within the Republican Party. But Douglass is not, Frederick Douglass is not a Republican. He is an abolitionist. And despite what the opponents of Lincoln are trying to say, what Stephen Douglas is trying to brand Lincoln and the Republican Party as abolitionists, they are not abolitionists.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: They're opposed to the extension of slavery into the territories. They're anti-slavery, but they are not calling for an immediate end to slavery in the slave states, whereas Douglass is, as he says, he occupies "the genuine abolition ground."

KRISTOL: I see. So he's not where Lincoln is in sort of, "We need to have the ultimate" – what's the phrase? "The ultimate extinction of slavery," or something –

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: It's the goal, but for now he's willing, Lincoln, to guarantee to the southern states not to be interfered with.

SCHAUB: Right.

KRISTOL: That's not Douglass's position.

SCHAUB: That's not Douglass. And, in fact, we maybe should go back, say something more about his interpretation of those clauses in the Constitution that have some relevance to slavery. So he's prepared to read the three-fifths clause, the importation clause, which is already now a dead letter. Right? The international slave trade has been banned for the last few decades. He's prepared to read those in a way that puts the Founders in a good light, puts the Founders, you know, on record as anti-slavery.

But what is called “the fugitive slave clause,” that he cannot accept. And he reads that in the way that Lysander Spooner does, that it refers only to indentured servants, the clause seems to have sort of implications of contract. The slave obviously hasn’t entered into any contract. So I think Douglass really could not have looked favorably upon the Constitution if he thought it did obligate non-slave holders to become complicit with slavery to the extent that they had to return runaway slaves.

KRISTOL: And is this Douglass’s genuine view of what the Founders intended? Or his view of, is he saving the Constitution by reinterpreting that?

SCHAUB: Yeah, you know, I mean, you could say, well, isn’t this sort of literalism? Just a kind of semantic trick? But –

KRISTOL: It could be an important trick.

SCHAUB: I think he’s sincere, and he does go back and look at the records of the Constitutional Convention.

KRISTOL: I mean, maybe there’s basis for that. I don’t know anything about it.

SCHAUB: Yeah, I mean, you have the southern delegates, Georgia and South Carolina saying we want a provision for fugitive slaves to be returned like criminals. That’s the language that they want.

KRISTOL: I see.

SCHAUB: And you do immediately get a push back, and you have people who stand up and say, well, we don’t want to allow the idea of property of man into the Constitution. We’re completely opposed to that. And then it disappears into committee.

KRISTOL: Oh, that’s interesting.

SCHAUB: And then we don’t know what happens, but we get something that comes back that now talks about persons held to service or labor under the state laws thereof. We get this very carefully constructed clause, and Douglass says it means that the people opposed to the idea of property of man *won*, and all that was given was a provision for the return of indentured servants who were held by contract.

KRISTOL: That’s interesting. So it really was important to him to establish the principle that the Constitution was anti-slavery.

SCHAUB: Yeah. And he said it’s a glorious liberty document and it should be wielded in the cause of emancipation. So I think this is actually the point that at which Douglass and Lincoln really disagree on the Constitution, because Lincoln believed there was a fugitive slave clause, and that there was an obligation on the party of Northerners to return fugitives. He considered it obnoxious, but it was what was called “the federal consensus”: the Constitutional bargain respecting slavery.

KRISTOL: And in general, in Douglass’s arguments against slavery – I mean, it’s not that hard to argue against, for the injustice of slavery – but people have done it on different grounds, at the time and subsequently: the Declaration of Independence, natural equality, or on Lockean grounds, you might say, John Locke or Christian grounds. What was Douglass’s core?

SCHAUB: Douglass does all of those.

KRISTOL: Is that right? Okay.

SCHAUB: And really unites them: natural rights, natural rights that come to us from a Creator. So he, yeah, he is in many respects a good Lockean, and especially in his belief in the legitimacy of violence. If natural rights are being denied, then you are within your rights to resist with violence.

KRISTOL: But does he in practice in the 1850s encourage violence or simply stay sort of agnostic?

SCHAUB: Well, he certainly thinks that for the slaves it's legitimate. He was a supporter of John Brown. Gave Brown money, consulted with him. He was not in favor of the raid on Harper's Ferry. He thought that was a suicide mission. He declined to participate.

KRISTOL: That was wise.

SCHAUB: But, yeah. So for the slaves he thought it was legitimate, but he goes farther than that, and this again involves the fugitive slave clause. He argued that the friends of the slaves, if an attempt is being made to return a fugitive to slavery, that it was legitimate to kill the kidnapper. So –

KRISTOL: So he's not that kind of, this is jumping a century ahead, fighting segregation, so it's not comparable, but there's not that Martin Luther King sort of Christian, turn the other, you know –

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Turn the other cheek side, so much, to Douglass.

SCHAUB: Yeah, I think –

KRISTOL: I mean, maybe he would have been if it was a century later and you were just dealing with discrimination.

SCHAUB: Yeah, I think because of a lesson that he had learned from his contest with Covey: that sweet reason is not always enough and that there has to be, you have to be willing to hazard your life for your liberty. So that's interesting, too, I think, in his understanding of Locke. Right? You have this threesome: life, liberty, pursuit of happiness. But they don't always go together.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: And Douglass understood that you have to be willing to put liberty before life. And, in a way, that's how you prove that you're worthy of liberty is that you're willing to hazard your life. And so this comes through very much in his involvement in getting African – first making sure that African Americans were accepted into the armed forces during the Civil War, and then actually taking an active hand in recruitment.

So he took the lead in the recruitment for the 54th and 55th Massachusetts, the black regiments, and he signed his sons up first, his two sons fought.

KRISTOL: So just to go back to the beginning of the war. So the Civil War begins –

SCHAUB: Sorry, I'm going out of chronology.

KRISTOL: Oh, no, it's good. No, no. At that point did Douglass, I mean, did these distinctions between Douglass and Lincoln and other kinds of abolitionists sort of begin to disappear a little bit? Everyone's sort of on the same side?

SCHAUB: Yes and no. I mean, he's interesting, because "we should vote for the Liberty Party," but then I imagine when the moment came he voted for the Republican. So up sort of until the last second he's saying "we vote for the Liberty Party," but then, yeah –

KRISTOL: And is he tolerant of Lincoln's bending over backwards, let's call it, to try to keep the Union together and to reassure them that he's not necessarily –

SCHAUB: Not so much. He heaps abuse on Lincoln. He's very disappointed in the First Inaugural.

KRISTOL: In '61, '62.

SCHAUB: Yeah, he's very disappointed in the first inaugural, which he thought contained way too much appeasement. He's not sure, even though the Republicans are anti-slavery, whether you can really look for very much to come from them. He's pretty rough on Lincoln until the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

KRISTOL: And that's the key point, where –

SCHAUB: Yeah. So I mean the abolitionists are pushing Lincoln, you know, turn this war for the Union into a war for abolition. Frederick Douglass was certain from the beginning that it was, in fact, a war for abolition and that it would mean the end of slavery. And he wanted that to come about as quickly as possible.

KRISTOL: It did. It took a little longer. And at that point, now, then he meets Lincoln; he's invited to the White House?

SCHAUB: They do meet on about three occasions. Lincoln asks to consult with him. He particularly consulted about African Americans being welcomed into the Armed Forces. So they talked about that.

Douglass at a later point complained to Lincoln because, of course, the South was not treating captured black soldiers as prisoners of war. They were instead treating them as criminals and felons and returning them to slavery or simply killing them. So, Douglass asked Lincoln to retaliate in kind with Confederate prisoners of war. Lincoln said he could not do that. But he was, you know, willing to take other steps to –

KRISTOL: I'm interested. I really hadn't thought about – I guess the black regiments was really an important – I mean, of course one hears about them in history and their memorial is in Boston and so forth, but I guess I had never really focused on how big a deal that was.

SCHAUB: Hugely important.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

SCHAUB: I mean, important to victory in the war. By the end of the war, there were 200,000 black troops. One-fifth of Union forces were African American. And remember there – I mean, but if you look – I mean, this is in a way the problem with what happened at the memorialization of the war after the war. The memorialization was done at the local level, and so all of the statues that were done were of local regiments and those would have been white regiments. So there was very little acknowledgement in statuary art.

KRISTOL: The African Americans were swept, so to speak, into black regiments. I mean, "colored regiments," whatever they called them.

SCHAUB: Yeah, they were –

KRISTOL: So they weren't local.

SCHAUB: No, that's right. They were segregated –

KRISTOL: Boston Freedmen and the New York Freedmen.

SCHAUB: Right.

KRISTOL: It was all – I see.

SCHAUB: They were segregated, and they were, in effect, federal, not –

KRISTOL: That's interesting.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: But that's important for Douglass that they fight, obviously, for their own freedom.

SCHAUB: Yeah, and the reason he thought it was so important is because he knew there was a belief, because blacks had been in slavery for so long, that there was either a natural or an acquired slavishness. And to shake that reputation it would be essential that blacks not be *given* freedom. You cannot be given freedom. Douglass knew that himself, because he had earned his freedom; he had conquered his ignorance by learning to read; and he had conquered his fear of death in that fight with Covey.

Douglass's favorite line of poetry comes from Byron: "Hereditary bondmen know thee not; who would be freed themselves must strike the blow." So it was essential that African Americans fight, and he thought it would be essential for their self-esteem and self-respect. And he thought it would be essential for changing the hearts of white Americans that they had to see that display of courage from African Americans.

Douglass knew that America came to be in a Revolution, in a fight for liberty, and the only way to sort of be a full American is to somehow partake in that, or participate in that. It seems to me Douglass was also laying the foundation for the vote after the war. So it was part of, it is part of his – it was part of Douglass's reconstruction project. By fighting, that would give African Americans a claim to the vote.

In other words, Douglass understood that there's a difference between natural rights and civil rights. blacks had a natural right to liberty; that didn't mean that they had a claim upon civic participation. So he knew that a different kind of argument was going to be necessary to establish that. So, you can point to 200 years of labor and building the country, things like that, but you could also point to the service in the Civil War.

KRISTOL: He's very active, obviously, in the fight then for –

SCHAUB: For the 15th Amendment.

KRISTOL: 15th Amendment.

SCHAUB: Yeah. He's one of the prime movers for the 15th Amendment.

KRISTOL: And then of course –

SCHAUB: It actually led to a little bit of a falling out between Frederick Douglass and his feminist friends, because he had been early in the cause of the vote for women. The first issue of the *North Star* had as one of its little tags up at the top, “Right is of no sex.”

KRISTOL: One forgets – I forget, maybe other people remember – how early that, I mean, how much, how mixed up in a way the abolitionists movement and women’s suffrage and women’s equality was –

SCHAUB: And even other things like “free love” and –

KRISTOL: Yeah, right. So why was there some issue in the 15th Amendment? Oh because women didn’t get the vote, just former slaves.

SCHAUB: Yeah, because the feminists were saying actually –

KRISTOL: What about us? Right?

SCHAUB: They said it in a very obnoxious way; it was what Cady Stanton said, “We’re not going to stand aside and see Sambo get in the door before us.”

KRISTOL: Wow.

SCHAUB: So it led to a real split for a little while. Although, interestingly, the black female abolitionists stayed with Douglass, and they understood that it was more imperative for black men to have the vote as a mere matter of self-protection.

II: The Importance of Douglass (33:47– 59:12)

KRISTOL: Yeah. And Douglass then, I assume – I don’t know much about his post. So he’s still a pretty young man in 1865.

SCHAUB: In his prime, really, during the war, yes. So he continues as the leading black spokesman for civil rights after the war. For civil rights, for labor rights, for women’s rights.

KRISTOL: And he’s, of course, I’m sure extremely unhappy when Reconstruction is abandoned and various compromises are made to basically leave the South alone and abandon, really, the blacks in the South. Right?

SCHAUB: Yeah. So the point that we made earlier about his willingness to countenance violence, you know, against the enforcement of the fugitive slave clause, once you have the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, I don’t think he ever sides with violence again. He knows that you now, that the law is the black man’s friend; you have the law on your side. So he’s terribly disheartened by things like when the Supreme Court goes against, you know, strikes down the Civil Rights Act. But he says, “We’ve been wounded in the house of our friends.”

So the speech about the Supreme Court is very interesting. It gives vent to that anger and disappointment, but then he sort of goes back and says we’ve got to remember we operate through the law, and so there’s this very careful calibration, you know –

KRISTOL: And he stays kind of that way through the 1870s and the – I mean, he never is so embittered by what’s happening that he turns against the – he remains –

SCHAUB: Yeah. Just this ebullient temperament, of confidence that the universe really is on the side of justice. That seems to see him through everything. I mean, one of his last great speeches is the denunciation of lynching. Things are getting very bad in the 1880s, he sees all of that.

KRISTOL: I guess he doesn't see, *Plessy v Ferguson*. Right? He dies before that.

SCHAUB: Right. Yeah.

KRISTOL: That would have been bad. That's interesting.

Now, if I'm not mistaken, not having been that close to Lincoln and having differed with Lincoln, he then, doesn't he give a famous speech, was it ten years after the war, I don't know, where he sort of reconsiders Lincoln?

SCHAUB: 1876, yeah. So as I said, once you have the Emancipation Proclamation, he's much more generous in his evaluations of Lincoln. And then, again, after the Second Inaugural, which his description of the Second Inaugural when he met Lincoln at the reception afterwards at the white House. Actually, that story's maybe worth telling.

KRISTOL: Yeah, please. No, please.

SCHAUB: He's invited to the reception, he arrives, they apparently don't have the guest list in front of them, and they refuse to let him in. He tries to – his friends kind of bring him in through the open-door window kinds of things. He's escorted out again. Eventually someone tells Lincoln what's happening; he has to intervene so that Douglass is allowed entrance. He then comes through the receiving line and Lincoln greets him and says, "You're the man I most want to hear from. I want to know what you thought of it."

KRISTOL: Wow.

SCHAUB: And Douglass says, "That was a sacred effort, Mr. President." So I think that really sums up somehow the essence of the Second Inaugural that it was a sacred effort, an attempt to give an interpretation of the Civil War that would allow the nation to go forward on a foundation of generosity and magnanimity and charity.

So, in every speech that Douglass gave after the war where he mentioned Lincoln, he quoted those lines from the second inaugural, the sort of divine reparation line, you know. "If this war has to continue until every drop of blood drawn with a lash is repaid with another drawn with the sword, then," you know, "it must be said that judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

So it was those lines, I think, for Douglass because it meant that America was acknowledging the sin of American slavery.

KRISTOL: Right. And the whole country, not just blaming the South.

SCHAUB: Yeah. So I think after the war that Douglass wanted to sort of use the memory of Lincoln and the words of Lincoln to keep America to that promise, to keep America on that track. So that the speech then that you started with, the 1876 speech, is an oration in memory of Abraham Lincoln. It was given on the occasion of the dedication of the Freedman's monument, which was a monument, the first monument, actually, erected to Lincoln and erected entirely, paid for entirely by donations from freed slaves.

KRISTOL: Wow.

SCHAUB: So Douglass was chosen to give the –

KRISTOL: And that's here.

SCHAUB: The keynote address. Yeah, it's just about a mile from here.

KRISTOL: Here in Washington, right.

SCHAUB: So in that speech I think is the fullest accounting that Douglass gives of how blacks in particular ought to view Lincoln. But it's given at a moment when Reconstruction is being abandoned. And I think that Douglass is trying to think about how you can use the shared appreciation of Lincoln as a way to bring the country back together.

KRISTOL: And issues updated versions of his autobiography, I think.

SCHAUB: Yeah, a couple of times. So the narrative is just his life in slavery. Right? *Narrative of My Life in Slavery*. A few years after his entry into the abolitionist world, he redoes the autobiography. He adds his abolitionist work into it, but he also goes back and adds a lot about his life in slavery. And it's actually really quite interesting what he does, because the narrative is just a recounting of horrors, the awfulness of slavery.

But when he goes back and rewrites those sections, he really tells you more about his own experience, which is not just an experience of the horrors of slavery. In fact, Douglass's experience seems to alternate between the kind of rather privileged conditions as a slave when he's in Baltimore working for this family and, you know, the times when he's doing field work.

So he's sort of going back and forth between a more privileged condition and a really harsh condition. And, in a way, it seems to be that that is the source maybe of some of his insights into slavery and into freedom.

KRISTOL: But then the second and third editions – is there an edition after the war?

SCHAUB: There's a third edition also which, is vastly expanded, taking all the way up until well after the war.

KRISTOL: That you have recommendations to people as to which to read.

SCHAUB: The second one.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Because it has more than the first, but –

SCHAUB: Yeah, some of other – you know, he was appointed the Ambassador to Haiti and served as the Marshall in the District of Columbia and so he tells you about some of that.

KRISTOL: That's good.

SCHAUB: But not quite as interesting.

KRISTOL: And other speeches apart from the tribute to Lincoln. I guess there were several famous ones, some of them on the, What So Proudly We Hail website. But do you have a particular couple to recommend?

SCHAUB: Yeah, I think the Lincoln one, the 1876 one, but also one from the early 1850s called, “What to the slave is the Fourth of July?”

KRISTOL: Do you want to say a word about that?

SCHAUB: So that’s given on July 4th. It is a most unusual July 4th address. It’s not just, you know, all celebration and self-congratulation. He views the Fourth of July from the perspective of the slave.

KRISTOL: And this is the 1850s so slavery – pre-Civil War – so slavery exists.

SCHAUB: Yes. So he is speaking as a former slave and as the friend of the slave. His brothers and sisters are still in slavery. So it’s a very interesting speech. It falls into three main sections.

The first half of it is a wonderful appreciation of the revolutionary generation and the principles of the Revolution. So he describes them as “saving principles.” But then he says, “But those are your fathers, and I leave it to you” – the white audience – “to celebrate them.” He even makes this little comment saying, indicating, that he probably has a blood connection to those fathers also. But he’s not regularly descended from them. Douglass, of course, was of mixed race. His father was white and is usually thought to have been his first master. But he says, alright, I leave it to those of you who are regularly descended from the fathers to celebrate their achievement.

Then he shifts into an attack on the sons, an attack on the current generation. And he says, “You are the ones who have betrayed the promise of the Revolution,” and it is an absolutely savage attack. Trenchant, biting, vituperative, satirical, just ruthless. And that’s the whole center section of the speech, of this July 4th speech.

Then at the end, he shifts again, and he shifts not back to the Declaration but instead to the Constitution. And he says you’ve been told that your Constitution supports what you’re doing; you’ve been told that the Constitution is pro-slavery. You’ve been sold a bill of goods. It isn’t. It’s a glorious liberty document.

So it’s a really interesting frame, you know, the attack on the current generation sandwiched between this appreciation of the Declaration and the Revolution and the appreciation of the Constitution. So I think for students today it shows them that you can be a patriot, a real, thorough-going patriot and that there is still this tremendous room for dissent and for critique.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that’s interesting. Did Douglass have – I’m just curious about people who influenced him and then people whom he influenced. So I mean, he obviously studied the Founders. Were there other, I’m just curious, where there other authors? I mean, maybe he was more of a man of action and of contemporary controversy than sitting around reading novels or Shakespeare or something. But were there others who particularly influenced him?

SCHAUB: Yeah, that’s an interesting question. I mean, he’s entirely self-educated. So, you know, he had this volume, the *Columbian Orator*. He remains a reader and a learner throughout his life. His self-education continues. I suppose much of what he’s reading are sort of the political pamphlets of the day and the sort of pamphlet wars.

He certainly sort of apprentices himself to Garrett Smith, of the Liberty Party, and Lysander Spooner for his understanding of the Constitution and how you read a written text. If you look at the sort of allusions that he makes, it’s – those lines from Byron, Shakespeare, he quotes from Shakespeare in a number of occasions.

KRISTOL: The Bible? Is he religious? I mean, is he sort of a churchgoer?

SCHAUB: Well, again, he bitterly denounces the church and the way in which the churches have become complicit with slavery. But he's clearly, you know, he's always appealing to God, to providence, to – yeah, so I would say he has a religious belief or a religious temperament.

KRISTOL: Right. But not a – And after, I mean, so he – when does he die? I can't remember.

SCHAUB: 1895.

KRISTOL: So right before *Plessy v Ferguson*.

SCHAUB: Yeah. Yeah. That morning he spent speaking to the National Council of Women, giving them a speech on women's rights, came home and died of a heart attack.

KRISTOL: And his influence. I mean, now we capture – we'll talk about this is in a minute, about what lessons we can learn from him and we should learn from him, and study him. But afterwards, did it fade some? Was he very much alive as a figure in African American thought, in American thought generally? Do you have a judgment?

SCHAUB: I think he does disappear – I mean, he wouldn't have been taught in schools, he would not have been part of the curriculum until more recently.

But I think he was always important for African American figures. So you can see it with Booker T. Washington. Booker T. Washington talks about how important it was for him in his own education that there was that model of Frederick Douglass. Anytime anybody told him, well, those avenues are foreclosed to you because you are a black boy, he could always say, *well, what about Frederick Douglass?*

KRISTOL: So he remains a huge figure in the African American community despite all the arguments of Dubois and Washington and stuff? But not so much –

SCHAUB: And interesting, I mean, a figure that has appealed to sort of within different strands of black thought. So Booker T. Washington would usually be thought of on the more kind of conservative track. He's a huge admirer of Frederick Douglass. Dubois, who's thought of on the more left-wing side of things, also a huge admirer of Frederick Douglass. And there's I think a kind of, it continues today. I remember Al Sharpton criticized Obama for announcing his candidacy in Springfield and talking about Lincoln. He said you should have come here to Rochester, New York, and talked about Frederick Douglass.

KRISTOL: That's interesting.

SCHAUB: Sharpton said, "We've got to stop giving the wrong people credit for our history."

KRISTOL: I'm not sure he's right, but that's a fairly intelligent comment from – I wasn't aware that Sharpton had that sophisticated a view. But that's interesting, actually. You can see that. It seems so natural if you're just watching it as a white American: *of course, why wouldn't you do Lincoln in Springfield?* And it probably was the prudent thing for Obama to do. But I can see that point from Sharpton.

SCHAUB: So more attention to black agency.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

SCHAUB: What would now be called black agency.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Freedom has to be fought for and that's important.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: And today what do you think – you teach it. You teach it to college students and you've written so much about it; I'm sure you talk about it. What do you find people respond to? What should they respond to? What could people learn that they, I mean, apart from just the amazing story, which is itself worth obviously reminding oneself of.

SCHAUB: Yeah, I do think students need more biography. You know, political philosophy is good but can be a little cold sometimes. So I think it is good to have heroes. And now especially that we're taking all these other statues down and we have the empty plinths, we should put more statues of Frederick Douglass up.

KRISTOL: Are there many?

SCHAUB: There are some, yeah. There's a nice one outside the – in Easton, Maryland, on the Eastern Shore, outside of the county courthouse there; there's a good one. There are a lot of murals of Frederick Douglass, not just in the United States but worldwide.

KRISTOL: That's interesting. I do think, yes, it's important for him to read by all Americans, not just by African Americans. They would have a special feeling about it. But we do divide up the history too much into these races and ethnicities. I'm Jewish, I feel that there are great statesmen, I mean, Jewish statesmen who would be of interest – some of the Jews read them, but, you know, others could learn from them and vice versa, obviously. We segment too much maybe.

And what do you find when you teach Douglass? I'm just curious. Any special, notable reactions one way or the other?

SCHAUB: That they are amazed at his life story. But also, and I think somewhat disturbingly they tend to say, "Well, okay, that's him. He was remarkable. And other people can't really imitate that."

So, when they read about his reaction to discrimination. There's a story, he's removed from the rail car and forced to ride in baggage. And his white friend comes back and joins him and says, "Oh, Frederick, I'm so sorry that they degraded you in this way." And Douglass says, "No one can degrade Frederick Douglass. They degraded themselves. They have not degraded me."

So in an age of kind of sensitivity and sensitivity training and hypersensitivity, when students encounter that they're awed by it, but they say, "Well, that's inimitable. People can't really react that way. Only someone like Frederick Douglass could react that way." So I find that, I find that disheartening, that that's their reaction to it. It seems to me if we took his reaction as more of a model and a model to be emulated –

KRISTOL: I suppose there is a tension between – of course, it's funny that the railroad car that is the issue in *Plessy v Ferguson* and discrimination in travel spills over to discrimination everywhere else. And if you want to right injustices you sort of have to claim that the injustice does harm.

SCHAUB: Does harm. Yeah.

KRISTOL: And so there is a tension between making that claim and saying, "But I'm too proud or dignified or strong to be harmed." I mean, both are understandable –

SCHAUB: Douglass's view of that does not lead him to say, "okay, we can be politically quiet about this and we don't have to agitate about it; we can put up with it and tolerate it, because it really doesn't hurt

us that much.” That’s not his view. So he’s somehow able to combine those things, or is able to give different messages to different audiences.

So the message that Douglass always gives to a black audience is a message of inner resources, of self-help, of dignity and character and virtue and what those things can achieve. The message that he gives to white audiences is “Get your own house in order. Stop doing this. We need to reform these laws.”

KRISTOL: Does he go so far as to say – which was a major theme I think of King’s – that this is also hurting you, the white master?

SCHAUB: Yeah. I mean, and in a way that’s what he’s saying. “They have not degraded me; they’ve degraded themselves.” And actually you can see that maybe more clearly in Booker T. Washington who actually says, these things that are being done to blacks, he says, “They inconvenience us, but they injure the white man. If any race uses its power to harm another race they have permanently injured themselves in morals.”

And so Booker T. Washington says, “It’s for the white race that I plead.” It’s an amazing act of both of sort of moral superiority and of care. Booker T. Washington cares for the souls of white delinquents. And you do see a little bit of that in King, King at his best. Where King says that by awakening the moral conscience – that he’s not just speaking to sort of the rest of America, America watching this on the news, but he’s speaking directly to the bigot and he’s trying to –

KRISTOL: And I suppose the mixture of principle and prudence, or however one wants to put that, in Douglass is applicable in different circumstances as a general matter of statesmanship? Would you argue that he really thought through where you need to stand and where you can compromise and so forth?

SCHAUB: Yeah, but I think that is a – it’s an evolution in his thought. I mean, clearly the abolitionists give nothing to prudence. The radical abolitionists, the Garrisonian abolitionists, nothing to prudence.

KRISTOL: And he rethinks that as an adult. I mean, that’s impressive. Right?

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: It’s rare. I mean, he was already kind of famous, and he’s giving speeches and then he sort of steps back and says – I mean, is that right? He really does explicitly almost changes his view.

SCHAUB: Right. So you see it in, it’s maybe partly there as a prudential element in his changing view of the Constitution. But only partly. I think he really does mean it sincerely. But there is that sort of prudential element in it. But it’s really more in thinking through what Lincoln means that Douglass comes to an appreciation of statesmanship.

KRISTOL: That’s great.

SCHAUB: So you can see it in that 1876 address where he says, “If you view Lincoln from the genuine abolition ground, he seemed tardy, dull, cold, and indifferent.” He put the cause of white America first.

But he says, “If you view him from the ground of statesmanship,” if you view him sort of from the perspective of white public opinion, which as a statesman Lincoln was obliged to consult, “then he was swift, zealous, radical and determined.” That Lincoln was always one-step ahead of public opinion, always moving and shaping public opinion in the right direction. But as a statesmen you can never be *more* than one-step ahead of public opinion.

So I think Douglass, in retrospect, really sees that about Lincoln and comes to appreciate it, and in that oration he shows now black voters how they should think about white elected officials. How much latitude to give them, when you have to sort of tolerate certain sorts of expressions that you really don't approve of, cannot sign onto. It's a really remarkable essay.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that sounds terrific.

SCHAUB: And it has this movement, because he sort of begins by saying, "Lincoln was not our President." He was not the black man's President. He was emphatically the white man's President. But by the end of speech, if you follow the trajectory of the speech, the unfolding argument, he ends by calling Lincoln "our friend and liberator." So he shows sort of what the –

KRISTOL: That's good. And you've written so well on Lincoln; we'll have to have a subsequent conversation on Lincoln and then that completes Lincoln and Douglass, the real Lincoln and Douglass, not the Lincoln/Douglas debates, you know. Two great statesmen.

SCHAUB: I actually came to Lincoln through Frederick Douglass.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

SCHAUB: Yeah. I didn't read either of them in any of my schooling.

KRISTOL: Wow. Let's hope this conversation begins to correct that and the people take a look at Douglass, obviously, and we'll come back and do Lincoln sometime soon.

Dianna, thank you so much for taking the time to be here today. And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]