

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

Guest: Diana Schaub

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I: The Lyceum Address 0:15 – 41:40

KRISTOL: Hi, welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm Bill Kristol and I'm very pleased to be joined today by Diana Schaub professor of political science at the Loyola University of Maryland, author of terrific works on Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Montesquieu, and others.

And we had a previous conversation about Frederick Douglass which I highly recommend people watch either before or after this conversation, in conjunction with this conversation.

SCHAUB: The two greatest men of the 19th century, in my opinion.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

SCHAUB: I think so, yeah.

KRISTOL: Greatest Americans or greatest men?

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Okay, you're going to go with greatest men.

SCHAUB: I'm going to go with greatest men.

KRISTOL: I have to make my case for Tocqueville at some point, but we can – that's a good conversation. Well they are awfully impressive.

And Lincoln of course is very daunting, how do we cover him in one conversation? We can't, but I guess we felt we might focus on three speeches: "The Lyceum speech" – he gives when he's 28 years old, I think. And then "Gettysburg," and "The Second Inaugural," the two great speeches of his presidency. And sort of what he's trying to – we can at least scrape the surface of what he's trying to accomplish in these speeches in terms of his understanding of America, equality, and so forth. So "The Lyceum Speech."

SCHAUB: Yeah, happy to –

KRISTOL: He gives that when he's, what? Twenty-eight years-old?

SCHAUB: Yes, a young man, he's already an elected official. He's serving his second term in the Illinois House, and he's invited to give a lecture as a kind of rising local dignitary. More well-known outsiders were also invited to give these addresses. Emerson, apparently, made an appearance at the Springfield Lyceum. We don't know whether Lincoln was in attendance at that or not.

KRISTOL: Oh that's interesting.

SCHAUB: So –

KRISTOL: And we have the text of the speech because Lincoln seems to have – it gets printed, I think in the newspaper, is that right?

SCHAUB: Yeah, sure, that would have been the tradition. And we also know that Lincoln was extremely careful to make sure that his things got into print; and he supervised their production very carefully. So things like his use of italics, which he likes to use a lot, gives kind of an indication to his meaning, and so you get quite a bit of that in this, in this speech.

So I think it's clear that it was meant to be heard, but also very much meant to be read, and still worth our reading and studying.

KRISTOL: And this speech I think wasn't so famous back in the day so to speak.

SCHAUB: That's right. It was sort of rediscovered in part because it seems a pre-figuration of his own role in the Civil War. At a certain point he speaks of a person of great ambition who will be willing either to emancipate slaves or enslave free men. A person of great ambition wouldn't so much distinguish between whether he did one or the other, great ambition is neutral. And so Lincoln's own act of emancipating the slaves was read back into this speech. And the question has to arise, would Lincoln had been willing to enslave free men if he had not had the opportunity to free the slaves?

Of course there are some anti-Lincoln folks who think that he did enslave free men. So, this has become a speech that's a rather contentious speech, I think –

KRISTOL: Right, that's my impression.

SCHAUB: The interpretation of it.

KRISTOL: The topic of it, which I think he's given, right?

SCHAUB: No, no, no,

KRISTOL: Oh, he chooses?

SCHAUB: He chooses this topic, yeah. And this is, again, very characteristic of Lincoln, there's no preamble, there's no windup. He goes directly to his topic. He tells you "As a subject for the remarks of the evening, the perpetuation of our political institutions is selected." That's his topic sentence, his thesis sentence doesn't come until a bit later.

KRISTOL: I think "the perpetuation of our political institutions" is maybe not the typical topic that a 28 year old state legislator would take, you know, it's kind of a big – I mean, it's interesting how such a young man he was thinking so broadly and deeply too, but about the meaning of America, not about simply, you know, am I a Whig or am I a Jacksonian? Or what's my policy agenda? You know.

SCHAUB: And actually that's, that's interesting because Van Buren's first term is just beginning, but Van Buren is sort of the handpicked successor to Jackson and his two terms. So from the Whig perspective, and Lincoln is a Whig, this is a kind of continuation of Jacksonian tyranny. But Lincoln here does not take at all a narrowly partisan approach. But he is, I think, in conversation, maybe especially with Jackson. And Jackson's farewell address had raised this question about the perpetuation of our political institutions.

KRISTOL: I didn't know that. Now I have to read Andrew Jackson again.

SCHAUB: I think there's a kind of key moment later where Lincoln is issuing a certain, a certain correction to what Jackson calls for.

KRISTOL: And what should people look for in this speech as they, as they go read it? I mean what's, what's –

SCHAUB: Well, you should look for what's in it. [chuckles]

KRISTOL: Yes.

SCHAUB: Which I guess means reading it carefully. He is engaged in a kind of diagnosis of the dangers of democracy. So the, the current danger, which he sees as the advent of "Mobocracy" or mob rule, he's very concerned about these incidents of vigilante justice that are breaking out all over the country. So, he's concerned about those, those current dangers, and then he has a certain solution that he recommends.

And then there's a second half of the speech where he's concerned about future dangers, and that involves an analysis of the passions, both the passions of the great and the passions of ordinary folks, and then there is a kind of solution to that.

So there are sort of two diagnoses and two sets of solutions. And there's a question of how those two sets of solutions accord with one another.

So, reverence is the first solution, and reason is the second one. But we're maybe getting ahead of ourselves.

KRISTOL: No, no, no that's a good – that's a very good, a very clarifying summary for me because it's always been a somewhat bewildering – I mean, you can read it carefully and see a lot of irony, and things going on, but the overall structure is somewhat mystifying or, or it doubles back on itself, I guess.

SCHAUB: Yes.

KRISTOL: It's almost a second start of it when he gets beyond – I think you're right, I think the first part is fairly, not conventional, that's too strong, but I mean it's mob rule, and therefore you need to have respect for the reverence for the rule of law. That's kind of the –

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: But then it really veers off.

SCHAUB: Takes another turn, a deeper turn.

KRISTOL: So explain that turn.

SCHAUB: Yeah, well, maybe we could just start by saying something about this initial topic, the perpetuation of our political institutions. So in the course of considering perpetuation, which means what does this generation need to do? What do we need to keep on going? How do we maintain this

government? It requires a reflection on how we got to this point. So it requires a reflection on the founding, and it requires a reflection on how the republic might be lost, the destruction of a republic.

So it turns out that perpetuation, and consideration of perpetuation, entails a comprehensive political reflection on founding, un-founding, possibly re-founding. So I think it's a pretty spectacular performance from a, from a young man, from anyone maybe.

So, we mention doubling. There are many moments of doubling in the speech. In the beginning the first treatment of the Founders it seems that founding is the higher task, higher than perpetuation. Right? "Theirs was the task, and nobly they performed it," right. "'Tis ours only to transmit." Right? We are just the inheritors, we're lucky. Just, just don't blow it. Right.

But, later there is a reconsideration of the Founders. And there he says, well, really what they achieved is not much to be wondered at because it had all kinds of props. It was propped up by the passions. It just so happened that the self-interest of the Founders, their quest for fame and celebrity was in accord with the common good, with the establishment of republicanism.

But that won't be the case in the future. In the future, men of great ambition they won't be sufficient just to be a custodian in the House of the Fathers, right? This – I mean it's really spectacular what he says. He says, well, there are lots of great and good men, you know, who would be satisfied with being representative or being President of the United States, those are people who lack lofty ambition. People who would be satisfied with being president, right? But they don't belong to the Family of the Lion and the Tribe of the Eagle. People like that would scorn to serve in the footsteps of any predecessor.

So Lincoln is very worried about this individual of over-weening ambition. What is the fate of a person of the founding type who comes along after the Founding?

KRISTOL: So there's an analysis on two levels. I mean, this is doubly doubling if you want to get fancy. I mean he seems to analyze both the incentives or the ambitions of the few, let's call it, which is you say at the Founding seemed to be in conjunction with setting up a republic. And Washington will be revered, so that's all fine. And then we'll come back to that, I suppose, how problematic those people find the situation now.

But then there's the public as well, who at the beginning, I think, Lincoln does stress it's not quite so hard to get them loyal to the new country because they have memories of the battles and a kind of patriotism from that, right?

SCHAUB: Yeah, so the, the issue there is at the time of the Founding there were all of these passions, negative passions, revenge and hatred. But all of those passions could be directed against the British. So, at the time of the Founding the passions of the people served the revolution, served the establishment of republicanism. But after, those passions will turn inward; inward will become the basis of divisiveness.

So, he, he says that now and in the future, passion is our enemy, we really have to turn to reason.

KRISTOL: So there are the few and the many. There's a problem with the few, and there's a problem with the many.

SCHAUB: The few and the many, right. He evaluates the future dangers both from the perspective of the few and the perspective of the many.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's kind of striking, too, for a 28-year-old in –

SCHAUB: In a democracy.

KRISTOL: Tocqueville has just visited, where “everyone is a democrat,” you know, with a little “d”. He’s so aware of that distinction.

SCHAUB: Yeah, and in fact it’s interesting to compare Lincoln and Tocqueville on ambition because Tocqueville’s worry seems to be that there won’t be lofty ambition, right? That ambition will just become mediocre and directed only towards material goods. And so Tocqueville looks for a way really to preserve lofty ambition.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: Whereas Lincoln says no, there really is a permanent human nature, and we have to assume that individuals of this type will arise. So it’s not a matter of – for Lincoln of, of quashing that ambition, it will be there, and it will arise, you have to prepare the people to meet it.

And, so he says the people have to be prepared. You have to have general intelligence and sound morality, and reverence for the Constitution and laws, and those three things together will enable the people to reject the individual of over-weening ambition. In other words, to enable them really to have some kind of insight into tyranny.

KRISTOL: And that’s based on reason he says. Or claims.

SCHAUB: Uh, yeah.

KRISTOL: As opposed to the claim that “we will no longer have living memories of the Revolution,” and you know people can’t think back to the fight.

SCHAUB: Right, yeah, that section is very interesting and very beautifully written. But he seems to say that history will not be sufficient. So he says that the scenes of the Revolution will have a different standing once the living history is gone. He says the living history that you know carries it authenticity and the limbs mangled and scars of wounds received, you know, in other words once grandfather with his Civil War scars is gone he can’t tell those tales any longer.

KRISTOL: Revolutionary War scars in this case.

SCHAUB: Yeah, yeah, did I say Civil War? Yeah, sorry, there’s a big difference between those in their standing.

So it is interesting, he seems to say that the stories as they come through the books will not be enough, and something needs to replace that. So in a way he’s saying that the Founders, while they wanted to prove the possibility of a people to be self-governing that that experiment really has not yet been successful because it was supported by these other props; and we don’t really know the capacity of a people to govern itself until we can see that they are actually governing *themselves*. In other words it depends on a kind of individual self-government. And that depends on the priority of reason.

KRISTOL: I was thinking about this, a few years ago, I won’t embarrass myself when I try to do the math in my head, but at some point D-Day was about as much – we were about as much after D-Day as Lincoln’s speech was after the Revolution.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Because Lincoln’s speech is what? 1838.

SCHAUB: ’38.

KRISTOL: ’39 or ’38?

SCHAUB: '38, yeah.

KRISTOL: Which is '38 plus 26 so 64 years after the Revolution.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: 10 years ago that would have been D-Day.

SCHAUB: Yeah, so we are –

KRISTOL: And it's a similar thing, in a way, I kind of feel that that we don't have obviously many World War II vets, we don't have many Korean vets, so it's not just – the fight against totalitarianism, both on the right and the left, is somewhat now a history book question, not a lived thing.

SCHAUB: Yeah, we are living through this same kind of moment, the Greatest Generation will soon be gone. The last living World War I veteran died a few years ago.

KRISTOL: World War II will be soon.

SCHAUB: Yeah, World War II will be –

KRISTOL: And then in terms of the presidents: Bush, Reagan, you know, that whole generation obviously from Kennedy through George H.W. Bush, and so forth.

So, okay, so what's the solution for the few and the many? I mean, that seems a little less clear than the problem.

SCHAUB: Yeah, no, I think that's where he says that reason is the solution. Right? "Passion has helped us in the past, it can do so no longer, and in the future it will be cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason."

KRISTOL: But is that possible in politics?

SCHAUB: Well, [laughter] –

KRISTOL: I ask, I ask as a student of, you know – [laughter]

SCHAUB: Well, he is certainly aware of people's resistance to reason. He gives speech after speech taking people through the arguments, and they don't listen to him. He tells them already in 1838, he warns them of what's coming, and we still get the Civil War. He gives "The First Inaugural" where he pleads with them, and we still get the Civil War. So it, it may not be possible, but I think he is serious in telling us that that really is the proof that is needed.

KRISTOL: Well the proof that, yeah, you could preserve – I'm struck at the end on the next-to-last paragraph, as you said, "Reason – cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason must furnish all the materials for all our future support and defense. Let those materials be molded into general intelligence, sound morality, and in particular a reverence for the Constitution and laws." But reverence is not quite reason.

SCHAUB: No, but I believe he thinks that reverence is a kind of reasonable passion. Or maybe we have to think about how is he using this word passion? And he may not include everything within passion that we include. So he speaks sometimes about "states of feeling," and he thinks that a certain state of feeling should be cultivated or developed. And he doesn't call that passion.

In other words, he always uses passion to mean these negative passions. So, yeah, he says that it is reason that is molded into intelligence, morality, and reverence. So reverence has a kind of reasonable basis.

Or we could look at something like “The Temperance Address” where he says that – there he’s talking about persuasion and he gives a kind of theory of rhetoric. And he says that, he’s speaking against the Temperance folks, and maybe also the Abolitionists who are constantly speaking in tones of denunciation. He says that doesn’t persuade anybody that just gets people’s hackles up. So you have “to first convince someone that you are his sincere friend. Therein is a drop of honey that catches his heart which, say what he will, is the great high road to his reason.” So there he argues that the heart is the high road to reason.

KRISTOL: I guess I was sort of –

SCHAUB: So there’s more layers or complexity here than just cold, unimpassioned reason.

KRISTOL: Right, and at the end of that paragraph of “Lyceum,” the next to last paragraph of “The Lyceum Speech,” then he gets quite elevated in his rhetoric. And you know that we’ve revered, “we improved to the last; that we remained free to the last; that we revered his name to the last.” So that sounds quite religious, if I can put it that way.

And then in fact there’s an explicit illusion to, apparently, the end of days – “it shall be that which to learn the last trump shall awaken our Washington.” So, doesn’t that sort of suggest that there are limits to reason? I guess you’re more willing to concede that reverence can be reasonable than I am, maybe. But isn’t this sort of an indication that you need a political religion? You can say it’s based on reason, I think that would be reasonable to say. But there is a kind of acknowledgement of, let’s call it the limits of reason, or kind of the need for attachment, that goes –

SCHAUB: He’s getting awfully passionate about reason.

KRISTOL: Right, right.

SCHAUB: [chuckles] Right? Yeah, so we maybe got ahead of ourselves by not going through the discussion about mob law and, and the call for, for reverence.

KRISTOL: Well, the problem is mob rule and taking the law into your own hands.

SCHAUB: Yeah. And so why is that a problem? His account of that is kind of interesting; and again there is a sort of doubleness. He initially introduces this mob rule as really horrifying, right? “Repugnant to our humanity”, and he tells the two stories. The story of what happened in Mississippi with all of these lynchings and these lynchings sort of spiraling out of control. It sounds – he has this description of dead men seen literally dangling from the bows of trees upon every roadside.

It sounds like that, the wonderful jazz song “Strange Fruit.”

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: It’s kind of a horrifying picture. And then he talks about the scene, the horror striking scene in St. Louis. Let me just read that, “A single victim was only sacrificed there. His story is very short and is perhaps the most highly tragic of anything of its length which has ever been witnessed in real life. A mulatto man, by the name of Macintosh, was seized in the street, dragged to the suburbs of the city, chained to a tree, and actually burned to death, all within a single hour from the time he had been a free man, attending to his own business, and at peace with the world.”

So he gives this description of mob law in operation. And then he doubles back and he retells both stories. And now he says, “Well, the direct consequences were really not of much account. If the plague were to come along and sweep all the gamblers from Vicksburg from existence we would look upon that as a salutary event. These folks are not much to be missed.” And then he says, “the correct reasoning in regard to the burning of the negro in St. Louis,” – so no longer a ‘mulatto by the name of Macintosh,’ but

'a negro in St. Louis' – "who had committed an outrageous murder, he would have died by the course of the law a short time afterwards." So he says, "for him alone it was probably as well the way it was."

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's an amazing –

SCHAUB: So, why, why does he do this?

KRISTOL: It's an amazing, within two or three paragraphs a total reversal almost. Yeah.

SCHAUB: Yeah. So it seems to me he's giving a kind of illustration of passion. And he's showing in fact that he can tell a story in a way that makes us react passionately.

KRISTOL: But a misleading story, maybe.

SCHAUB: Yeah, maybe, yeah. I mean, he says the correct reasoning is, you know, this guy was a murderer.

KRISTOL: Right, so it's a good example of how you can be –

SCHAUB: How you can be misled. So he's actually – and he has shown what was it that motivated the lynchers? What motivated the lynchers was their sense of justice. So now he's forcing Americans to think not only about that tyrant out there, but that they themselves have these tyrannical tendencies. Mob law is a kind of tyranny of the mass.

So, he wants us to shift from the direct consequences, to thinking about the indirect consequences, the long term. What does this mean for our attachment to our nation? What does it mean for the status of the law? And you see Lincoln do this time and again in speeches where he would contrast the direct effect of something with the indirect or the prospective effect of something. He does it in "The Peoria Address" where he talks about the effect of The Kansas Nebraska Act and its principle, both its direct effect and its prospective principle.

So, so he does it here. And this requires that we think through it with him, rather than just acting sort of reacting.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: And then he takes us through it. What are the indirect effects? Well, the first of course is that the innocent would be lynched rather than the guilty. But then more problematically even "is that the lawless in spirit are encouraged to be lawless in practice."

So, there's a kind of recognition that there are folks out there who are only being held in check by the coercion of the law; and once that's removed they feel free to do what they like.

And then maybe even worse is that the good men, right, the law abiding lose their trust and faith in the government. And this is what he's most worried about, the alienation of affection on the part of citizens. So they are interested in security, and if popular government has this anarchic consequence that descends into mob rule, then those good citizens will look to a strongman, they will look to another form of government that can deliver security and order. So he says that really is the test to figure out how to reattach Americans to their government and law.

KRISTOL: Which he then he presses as he says, "for a strict observance of the laws" because even if they seem inconvenient, the rule of law is a terribly important principle to restrain the majority or a mob in a democracy.

SCHAUB: Yeah, and not just inconvenient but even when they're bad, right? Even bad laws must be obeyed religiously for the sake of law altogether.

KRISTOL: Which is a different attitude incidentally than the Founders – than the American people had in 1776 presumably. So there's a kind of – Perpetuation requires a different stance, perhaps, than the Founding, right?

SCHAUB: Yeah, although Lincoln certainly believes there is a right of revolution.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: So you would have to evaluate are these particular bad laws made by a democracy and therefore they are binding, right? Until you can convince the democracy otherwise, you are bound by those determinations of the majority.

So the situation in the English case might be different, those were not laws arrived at through self-government, but imposed without representation. But I think it's pretty clear that Lincoln thinks that the slaves are not bound by the laws of slavery, right? It's democratic citizens who are bound by those determinations of the majority.

KRISTOL: And so what else should we say about this very interesting speech?

SCHAUB: Well, maybe just that paragraph about reverence for the law and the way it contrasts with another one of our great moral lights, Martin Luther King Jr. who argues for civil disobedience. "An unjust law is not a law." And Lincoln I think is in fundamental disagreement with King about civil disobedience, that this formulation here would seem to disallow civil disobedience. There's a right of revolution, okay, but short of that you must obey. You must obey a law which is really a law of your own making if you are living under a Republican order.

KRISTOL: Now whether the blacks were entirely involved in the making of the law is a fair question, I suppose.

SCHAUB: Well, certainly the slaves are not. And even the status of free blacks depending on their citizenship – Or you mean even at the time of King?

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's not like they had much of a vote in these laws, right? In the South, so.

SCHAUB: Yeah, but then you might say well, alright, is disobedience allowed to achieve the vote, but not maybe for things like segregation?

KRISTOL: Yeah, but once they have the vote they can take care of segregation. I'm not sure it was entirely those two are entirely separable, but that's an interesting point.

SCHAUB: No, I mean, most of what King does not involve disobeying laws.

KRISTOL: Right, right.

SCHAUB: Right. It's only very occasionally that the movement steps into actual disobedience of law.

KRISTOL: Right. And –

SCHAUB: So in other words, nonviolent direct action that's not civil disobedience.

KRISTOL: Right. And even civil disobedience, it's been a long time since I've read King carefully at all, but even the kind of civil disobedience he calls for is ultimately for the sake of a reform that will allow for obedience, one could argue, so in that respect it takes a longer view. I mean it's not simply this law is unjust, we're not obeying it. You know it must be changed tomorrow.

It's more this law is unjust as part of a pattern which needs to be fundamentally changed. But once changed or as it's being changed there's a basic loyalty to the overall republic.

SCHAUB: Yeah, he claims he's showing the utmost respect for the law by violating the law in the way that he does it, lovingly, with the willingness to accept the, to accept the penalty.

But I still think there is a really fundamental disagreement here and that – and there were folks at the time of the Civil Rights struggle, including African American thinkers who were not on board with this middle ground of civil disobedience.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: Thinkers who were both more radical than King, like Malcolm X. Malcolm X says there is no halfway ground. It's either revolution – it's the ballot or the bullet, there's no in-between. And on the more conservative side there were those who argued that they could have achieved everything that was achieved by remaining within the law.

KRISTOL: Interesting, yeah. And of course for King the Christian, the appeal to a certain kind of religious moral law, I suppose, is very important. Which Lincoln does not seem to want to, in general, permit I would say, right? You know, there's this sort of notion that you get to make your own judgment about what Christianity or religion tells you.

SCHAUB: Right, so in fact that is what the abolitionists are doing, and Lincoln is very worried about their assault on constitutionalism. So the assault on the constitutionalism is coming not only from the South and the Calhounites, but it's also coming from the North and the abolitionists.

So maybe just one more thing is the paragraph after this where he does raise the question of abolitionism. So I think this is where he is responding quite directly to Jackson. What Jackson had said in his Farewell Address is that Americans must be very careful not to offend the sensibilities of the Southerners with respect to slavery. And pretty clearly implying that Northerners have no right to denounce slavery. And if we want to keep the nation together, if we want to avoid this sort of polarization and sectionalism you have to silence that moral sense.

And Lincoln is not prepared to go there. So Lincoln believes that there is an obligation on the part of the Federal Government not to intervene with slavery in the Slave States. Right. But there is no obligation to silence one's moral sense. And so this next paragraph I think he's really trying to open up space for political conversation. So he says "there's no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law. In any case that arises, as for instance the promulgation of abolitionism," right? He just happened to pick that one out of a hat. And remember the incident that has just happened in Illinois just a few weeks before this was the murder of Elijah Lovejoy, an abolitionist, editor of a newspaper. He was murdered and the printing presses were thrown into the river. So, officially Lincoln talks about St. Louis and Mississippi, but the incident that's uppermost in everyone's minds has just occurred in Alton, Illinois was the murder of an abolitionist.

So he says "in any case that arises, as for instance the promulgation of abolitionism, one of two positions is necessarily true: that the thing is right within itself, and therefore deserves the protection of all law and all good citizens. Or it is wrong, and therefore proper to be prohibited by legal enactments. And in neither case is the interposition of mob law either necessary, justifiable, or excusable."

Now Lincoln doesn't tell us here where he comes down on that question. He's just trying to open up space for reasonable conversation.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's interesting. He doesn't sort of say though free speech should be protected. Why not though? I mean –

SCHAUB: Yeah. Yeah, true. It's not an argument to –

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: Yeah, he actually seems to say if it were wrong then we could prohibit it by legal enactments.

KRISTOL: I've always struck by it, it does seem strange.

SCHAUB: It does seem strange.

Partly he may just – He may want to offer people that option, but he really wants to do is to just get them to say, “We have to raise the question of whether it's right or wrong or not.” Because if they raise the question of the rightness or wrongness of abolitionism, they must raise the question of the rightness or wrongness of slavery. And that's what he's wanting them to focus on.

KRISTOL: Which somehow underlies a lot of this speech, even though it's not the focus.

SCHAUB: Even though it's not – Yeah.

KRISTOL: Mentioned. It is mentioned, but not the focus.

SCHAUB: Yeah, and the same thing is true of “The Temperance Address.” The official topic is the Temperance movement and the rhetoric proper to this kind of moral reform. But the subterranean topic is slavery and abolitionism and their rhetoric, and whether there might be a better rhetoric to forward the anti-slavery cause.

KRISTOL: And “The Temperance Address” is just a few years after –

SCHAUB: A few years after this, 1842.

KRISTOL: So I mean it's interesting. Let's just take a minute on this, and if we don't get through all these other addresses we can have a second conversation. I mean, it's just so unbelievable that at age 28 and then at age 32, whenever he gives the Temperance Address he's giving these so carefully thought through and carefully wrought written speeches. And he's reflecting so much on popular government, the few and the many, the passions and reason. I mean, where does that come from? I guess it just comes from him being Lincoln. I mean, but do we know –

SCHAUB: Yeah –

KRISTOL: Is the myth sort of true? I mean, he doesn't really have much formal education, right?

SCHAUB: No, he has the least formal education of any of our presidents. Less than a year. A few weeks, a few months here and there in a formal classroom. So he was – He didn't have much formal schooling, but I would argue that he was extremely well educated and he was self-educated, and he went to great lengths to acquire that self-education.

Lord Charnwood author of my favorite biography of Lincoln in 1916, beautifully written. He talks about Lincoln's education and he says that it was actually an advantage to him. That he had few books, and that those few books were good books.

KRISTOL: And do we know which ones particularly he talked about?

SCHAUB: We know a little. The bible, and Shakespeare. He had some exposure to the main strands of the Western tradition because he had an anthology, *Murray's English Reader*. And so there would have been short snippets and selections from the Greeks and Romans. So a little Cicero and a little Demosthenes. There would have been a lot of English authors. You know, Addison and Steele. English

poets: Milton, Byron. He was not much of a novel reader, but he did like Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* which he had as a young person. So that's kind of exposure to modern thought I would say.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

SCHAUB: He was a great lover of poetry of [Robert] Burns. There's a very fine book by Fred Kaplan called – What is it called? *Lincoln as Writer* or *The Making of a Writer*, or something like that. But he sort of lays out everything that is known about what texts Lincoln had and at what point he was interested in them. And very nice insights about what he drew from them. So Burns was especially important both for his humor, his ability to be moral without being moralistic which you see in Lincoln. The ability to be moral without being moralistic. And the way in which humor can contribute to that, and his sort of large sense of humanity.

KRISTOL: I've never read any Burns, I guess I need to.

SCHAUB: Lincoln could apparently cite it and do the brogue.

KRISTOL: Oh wow.

SCHAUB: Very, very well.

KRISTOL: And he knew the American texts and –

SCHAUB: Yeah, and of course the American texts. So there he had both Parson Weems' *Life of Washington* and I think took a lot from that. Again that's a text that's now thought to be just sort of hagiographic and over-the-top. And it is a little over-the-top, but there's a lot of value in it, and Lincoln learned a lot about Washington from it, especially since it gives a text of the farewell address. Lincoln had clearly poured over the farewell address of Washington. And he had Franklin's autobiography. So those are his two sort of heroes: Washington and Franklin.

Yeah, and I think he gets a lot from Franklin, also. So the importance that he puts on the virtue of resolution. If you remember that section from Franklin where he sketches out his take on the virtues, the 13 virtues, the fourth one is Resolution. And Lincoln at a certain point in his life as a young man struggled with resolution. He felt that his bad behavior, his breaking off of his engagement to Mary Todd had shown that he lacked resolution. And he actually refused to put himself forward politically until he had reacquired or had become confident that he could trust himself in his resolutions.

KRISTOL: And then I suppose once he gets into public life, obviously he has, he's well aware of the debates and what's going on.

SCHAUB: Yeah a great reader of newspapers and political pamphlets in the same way that Washington is very much like that, immersed in the –

KRISTOL: You can see that obviously in the speeches and so forth, and yeah.

SCHAUB: Yeah, reading "The Congressional Record." He apparently memorized some speeches of Clay. Clay, he said, was his beau ideal of a statesman. Even though his own rhetoric seems to me not much like Clay's at all, but –

KRISTOL: Right, but he presents himself as a loyal supporter of Clay at least. He gives a nice eulogy to Clay.

SCHAUB: Yeah, the eulogy of Clay is also very interesting, and again I think a very clear subtext there is slavery.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: There's a battle going on over who gets to claim the legacy of Clay. The Democrats are trying to lay claim to it because they believe in compromise.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: And Lincoln tries to turn the legacy of Clay, in a way, away from compromise and towards the anti-slavery strand of Clay's thought.

KRISTOL: And that's just before the Civil War, right?

SCHAUB: Well, that's '52.

KRISTOL: Oh, '52, I thought it was a little later.

SCHAUB: Yeah, that's '52, so it's actually before Peoria, it's before the Kansas Nebraska Act.

KRISTOL: He says of Clay, which I agree he's not – I mean, in a way if you just read history, Clay is this great senator who is always finding compromises. But Lincoln's account of him is he loved America – what is it? – “not primarily because he was American but because he loved liberty,” or something like that?

SCHAUB: Yes, yeah.

KRISTOL: There's a very strong liberty component I would say.

SCHAUB: The liberty component which is also an anti-slavery component.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's interesting.

II: The Gettysburg Address (41:40 – 1:23:07)

KRISTOL: So, the most famous speech I suppose in American history, maybe in modern history, I don't know.

SCHAUB: And around the world.

KRISTOL: And around the world.

SCHAUB: I mean, this speech has standing around the world. It's certainly in the top five.

KRISTOL: And “The Gettysburg Address” delivered at Gettysburg. What November 19th? Is memory right? 1863?

SCHAUB: Yes.

KRISTOL: And so very short. That's the most striking thing about it, right?

SCHAUB: Yes.

KRISTOL: Intentionally so. So what does Lincoln intend by this? And let's just go through it, it's only three paragraphs, so we can actually look at the text.

SCHAUB: Okay. Yes, intentionally so in a couple of ways. Partly he's not the main speaker. Edward Everett is the main speaker and he gives a very long address, a two hour address. Lincoln is just asked to give some appropriate closing remarks. So there's a limitation there that the organizers have put upon

him. But it also seems to me, you see it also in the second inaugural, it's the shortest second inaugural – it's the shortest inaugural ever. So, Lincoln is moving towards this kind of brevity and concision.

And it's also connected – the brevity of it is connected with the claim that he makes about the status of words as compared to deeds. Now people often read that sentence as ironic, right? “The world will little note or long remember what we say here but it can never forget what they did here.” And they note the irony of the fact that this is a very famous speech. And this must be – students think well, this must be false modesty on his part.

But I actually think it's actually quite sincere and a little risky in a certain way. They've been there for about three hours at this point. Everett's two hour speech, you had these long prayers, and other intervening things, and Lincoln is speaking at the end of that. So, he says the world will no longer remember what we say here. So not just what – he's not using we as the royal we, he's saying what we've all been doing here for the last three hours, nobody is going to remember that. And in fact no one does remember Edward Everett's speech. And it's also the case that if the Union had not been victorious in the war, I suspect even Lincoln's speech would not be much remembered. So I think he is serious about the priority of deeds over speeches at this moment.

He is using words, but he is using words to inspire deeds and even what he says about dedication and devotion, even that is not enough. Right? That dedication and devotion have to be turned into resolve. That was Franklin's virtue of resolution. It has to be turned into action. In fact, you could, I think, reformat this speech as a resolution. You have a series of “whereas” clauses and then a “be it resolved that.”

KRISTOL: Okay, let's go through that. That's interesting.

No, you're right, I mean, “The Second Inaugural,” which we'll get to at another time, maybe, there's that wonderful sentence about, “Upon the progress of our arms.” “Everything depends upon the progress of our arms” and that is going satisfactorily, as the war is about to end. So yeah we don't need to talk about that. It is just in passing. But of course, not just resolution, but actual victory is kind of important if you're fighting for self-government, right?

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: All the nice speeches don't solve it if the forces of slavery win the Civil War, you know.

SCHAUB: Yeah, that always has to be remembered. I mean he is such a wordsmith and it's so wonderful just to study the words but – Words play a role in statesmanship, but prudence and making the right decision at the right time –

KRISTOL: Yeah winning the battle.

SCHAUB: – maybe more important.

KRISTOL: Winning the Battle of Gettysburg maybe more important than the speech of Gettysburg, right?

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Or makes possible maybe the speech of Gettysburg.

SCHAUB: Yeah, although, at the same time I then want to turn and go through this.

KRISTOL: So let's go through it.

SCHAUB: You know, word by word.

KRISTOL: Okay, let's just read. Just go over there, three paragraphs, right.

SCHAUB: He's just giving us a kind of definition of America, and an account of the meaning of the war. And a statement of what's at stake.

KRISTOL: It's written out. He seems to have worked on it fairly carefully. So, it's to be taken – and he supervises, and I think it's printed too. So he's –

SCHAUB: Yeah, Lincoln did not like to speak extemporaneously.

KRISTOL: So this is a text.

SCHAUB: Yeah, he didn't write on the back of the envelope on the way up to Gettysburg. It's clear he had been testing out and trying version of some of these phrases already in other speeches.

KRISTOL: Okay, so you read the first paragraph and then we'll talk about it.

SCHAUB: Okay. "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

KRISTOL: Okay. A lot to be said about that. Well, just the obvious, four score and seven years ago, so that's 1776.

SCHAUB: Ah, don't jump so quickly. How did you know that?

KRISTOL: I just did the math, I don't know.

SCHAUB: Yeah, okay. There are actually three mathematical operations involved.

KRISTOL: Okay.

SCHAUB: Right. 4 times 20.

KRISTOL: Correct.

SCHAUB: Plus 7.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: Gives you 87.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: Then you have to subtract –

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: – 87 from 1863 to get to 1776. So by the time anyone in the audience had done the calculation this speech would be over. You would miss the speech if you did the mathematical calculation.

KRISTOL: No, I agree with that. But the speech as a whole is intended to be read and memorized for many, many decades, not simply to be listened to, right?

SCHAUB: True. But it does raise an interesting question, I mean, why didn't he just say in 1776?

KRISTOL: I have a thought about that, but you go first.

SCHAUB: Okay, I mean students sometimes just say this is more poetic.

KRISTOL: Biblical sounding.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Yeah, is that it? Well, what do you think?

SCHAUB: It is more poetic. But yeah that can't be the full, the full answer.

KRISTOL: Right. So what?

SCHAUB: Well, the biblical resonance is important. I think that Leon Kass has made this point very nicely. According to the Bible the lifespan of a human being is – the natural lifespan of a human being is three score and ten. So four score and seven –

KRISTOL: A little more.

SCHAUB: – is more than that. So that means that there is no one in the audience here who could have been alive at the time of the Revolution. So he's really in a way going back to "The Lyceum Address" that problem of living history. And so it raises the question, what is the relationship between the lifespan of a nation and the lifespan of an individual? Especially since the nation may perish.

KRISTOL: Right. "Our fathers", so that also fits with that, I think.

SCHAUB: Yeah, so –

KRISTOL: Fathers in the broad sense.

SCHAUB: He is tapping into that kind of reverence or piety. Although he also seems to be saying, I mean many of the people in the audience are immigrants. It's not their biological fathers. And he doesn't say "the Founding Fathers." He in a way seems to be saying that all Americans can lay claim to the Founding Fathers as, as "our fathers."

KRISTOL: Right. And I think the "our" is important there, right? At the beginning, as opposed to just saying *the* Founding Fathers, or something like that.

SCHAUB: Yeah, right.

KRISTOL: But also it does put it very much in the past. I mean, don't you think the whole thrust of that first paragraph is almost to extend it into the past, even more than it really was? Since it was only 87 years ago before then. But "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth" has a vague sense of like, you know, in the olden times.

SCHAUB: Yeah, yeah.

KRISTOL: Which I think is important for that whole speech, right?

SCHAUB: It is, yeah because the speech moves in a linear fashion through the past. The opening paragraph is about the past, situated there. The second paragraph, "Now we are engaged," we move directly into the present moment. And then the very end of the speech, with the use of the future tense "the nation shall have a new birth of freedom," so it moves from past, present, to future.

KRISTOL: Okay, what else? The first paragraph.

SCHAUB: Well maybe just raise a question: why does he use the language of generation and birth? He doesn't use the language really of revolution.

KRISTOL: Or reasoning.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I mean self-evident truth becomes a proposition. But even before that as you say, "Our fathers brought forth a new nation conceived in liberty" which is has –

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: Yeah, it's a beautiful phrase. It's a little unclear what it, what it means.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Well, "conceived" can mean both, I suppose, right? The conceptual thought about –

SCHAUB: An idea.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: Yes, ideas are –

KRISTOL: Or "conceived" in the more biological –

SCHAUB: Yeah, so he seems to be playing on that imagery, and actually different moments. Conception comes before birth. So the nation is conceived in liberty and *then* the nation is brought forth. And that's the birth moment, right? And what's birthed is a new nation.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: And then "dedicated," that looks forward. "Dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." So you could argue that you actually have here conception, birth, and baptism.

KRISTOL: Hmm.

SCHAUB: The nation is given a certain guidance or direction by the Founding Fathers. Placed on a certain pathway. It's also a suggestion that liberty and equality those are the sort of two founding ideas, and you have to think about what the relationship between them is.

KRISTOL: That's good. Okay. That's more than what we could say, but we'll go to the second paragraph.

SCHAUB: Wait, but we're nowhere near done with the first paragraph.

KRISTOL: Okay, go right ahead, please.

SCHAUB: Well, we, I think, should say something about the use of the word "proposition."

KRISTOL: Yeah.

SCHAUB: In the Declaration it is said to be a "self-evident truth" that all men are created equal. A self-evident truth is an axiomatic truth. A truth that doesn't need to be proven and in fact can't be proven.

Remember we know that Lincoln was a student of Euclid, as an adult he put himself through the first six books of Euclid. He was very well aware the difference between an axiom and a proposition. And there

are other places in Lincoln's writing where he describes the principles of the Declaration as the *axioms* of free society, "Jefferson's Principles are the definitions and axioms of free society."

So here he instead describes it as a "proposition." And there are some who argue that this is highly significant, he has really taken that truth and put it now in a different category.

And I would have to ask why he does it? I guess my reading of it is that I don't think that Lincoln has changed his mind about the self-evidence of that truth, but he knows that political truths are not quite like mathematical truths. And political truths have to be *held* to be true, right, "we hold these truths to be self-evident," and it's perfectly clear that at least half the nation is no longer holding those truths to be self-evident. So it's as if it has now shifted into the category of a propositional truth that requires a demonstration, requires a proof.

KRISTOL: In practice.

SCHAUB: Yeah. And again you see the emphasis on action. This poses a dilemma for *us* in this generation.

KRISTOL: Right, I think that's very true. I've always thought the normal, so to speak, emphasis, which is understandable, on "these truths to be self-evident" misses the importance of "we hold."

SCHAUB: The "hold."

KRISTOL: Which has – it's extremely important that it begins that way.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: And very uncharacteristically, in the first couple paragraphs of the Declaration, which are mostly in the third person, you know, "a people should separate itself," and blah, blah, blah. Then suddenly that "we hold." And that really suggests that the truth is a truth, of course –

SCHAUB: It is truth. It's not just simply our truth, but –

KRISTOL: – but it's not simply a truth. But it also has to be our truth, which makes it slightly less – more problematic than maybe a mere truth, if I could –

SCHAUB: So these are truths, but *we* are the ones who hold them to be self-evident.

KRISTOL: Right, right, right. That's our doctrine, so to speak.

SCHAUB: Yeah. Okay.

KRISTOL: Okay.

SCHAUB: Second paragraph.

KRISTOL: Paragraph two, if I have your permission, okay.

SCHAUB: All right, are you going to read it aloud?

KRISTOL: Okay. "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this."

SCHAUB: This is another one of the, I think structural elements of the speech. So it does unfold in a linear way: past, present, and future, but it has other structural elements as well. And this “test” is part of that structure.

So I think there are actually three tests. So there is the test of, of “that nation,” in other words “that nation” as I have just defined it. That’s interesting, he doesn’t say “this nation” or “our nation,” he says “that nation.” I think he does that because he means, “not whatever nation you’re thinking about, but that nation as I have just defined it.” Those 30 words that explain what happened at the time of the Founding. So, what’s being tested is whether that nation can survive, but also whether any nation so conceived and so dedicated, he repeats both the liberty and the equality. Right. Whether any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure, so it’s a test of popular of government all together. If the American experiment fails it was sort the most privileged instance of self-government. If we can’t make a go of it then we really might have to give up on popular government.

And then I think there is a third test as well, but I’ll hold off on that until we get to the, to the third paragraph. And the solution to these tests is given in the final sentence of the speech. “If we resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom. A government of the people, by the people shall not perish.” That is the solution to the, to the test.

KRISTOL: I’ve always been struck by the “or any nation so conceived and so dedicated” and “Federalist One” toys with that thought too. But it can’t strictly be true, or be provably true. And it could just be, I mean if one were sitting in England, I’m making this up obviously, in 1865 one could have said, “Look, they had this particular problem of this institution of slavery getting very deeply embedded, very quickly, and then they mismanaged it.” Arguably, let’s just say, in the 1830, ’40s, ’50s so it fell apart and it didn’t survive. Life is full of failed experiments, not to be too glib about it, but it doesn’t mean we couldn’t have in happier circumstances shown that self-government, or as “Federalist One” puts it, government by reflection of choice, or government conceived in liberty and dedicated to equality couldn’t survive. It’s interesting that Lincoln really wants to make the universal claim, or seem to make the universal claim.

It’s not necessary is what I’m saying, you know. I mean he may think it’s necessary, but it’s not obviously necessary.

SCHAUB: Yeah, I guess I would say that for him, yeah, slavery is hugely important, but there is in a way a deeper issue at work.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: And that is the subscription to, to law and majority of rule. So won’t there always be something that comes along that will make it difficult to subscribe to the will of the majority? So, again, sort of back with the reverence for the law.

KRISTOL: I think that’s true. I just think, and I think it’s fair enough to say that slavery – it will always be something like, if you will, slavery to be as an obstacle in the way of self-government succeeding. I guess that’s more broadly the passions. And the passion to take advantage of others, and so forth.

But I also think it’s important rhetorically for Lincoln, as it was in the Founding too, to make this, oh, it’s more universalistic in significance than probably strict logic would allow, I would say, because that also allows you to appeal to the pride of Americans that they’re doing something of universal significance.

SCHAUB: Right.

KRISTOL: Not just, “hey, keep that country that these guys started four score and seven years ago going.” You know, that’s not –

SCHAUB: Yeah, there’s more at stake.

KRISTOL: Yeah. The “more at stake” is actually an inducement towards moderation and towards more, I don’t know, more thoughtful governance in a funny way. I mean, the immoderation of the claim is I believe –

SCHAUB: It actually supports moderation. Yeah, that’s nice.

KRISTOL: The universal claim in a way makes you say, “Oh, I – we can’t risk everything here.”

SCHAUB: Uh-huh.

KRISTOL: Where it’s worth the sacrifice of the Civil War, you know? Anyway, what were –

SCHAUB: Yeah, that’s nice.

KRISTOL: Okay. I mean, he goes out of his way, I would say most obviously in this paragraph, though it’s true in the whole speech, never to mention where – There’s no proper noun in the speech, with the possible exception of God.

SCHAUB: God and liberty, which is capitalized –

KRISTOL: And liberty, which seems to be capitalized.

SCHAUB: – and in a way personified.

KRISTOL: So liberty at the beginning and God in the middle, no – Nothing about the actual battle, nothing about, “here’s beautiful Pennsylvania, on this fall day here in Pennsylvania.” None of the normal stuff you would see in a speech in a battlefield, right?

SCHAUB: Yeah, it is incredibly abstract. So it’s not the United States of America, it’s just “a new nation,” right? It’s not “America,” it’s “this continent.” There’s no mention of the Union.

There is no mention of the enemy. The enemy are present only by implication. This is a national cemetery. It’s a cemetery for the Union dead. And so he says, “We’ve come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for these who here gave their lives that *that nation* might live.” In other words, there are others who gave their lives that the nation might perish. So they are there by, by implication.

I do think that the very stripped and abstract character of the speech is part of what accounts for its lasting character, and its ability to speak to people in many different nations and in many different eras. In other words, every generation, every citizen of a popular government can read this and somehow identify with this. It’s his way of saying there are always tasks for the present generation.

KRISTOL: And don’t you think in future generations of Americans, many of whom were going to be immigrants or children of immigrants as Lincoln himself knew, having spoken to that issue quite a lot in the 1850s, it’s easier for them to memorize this speech and make this *the* speech about American, than if it’s going on about these particular, you know – then the descendants of the Civil War soldiers would get sort of special pride of place. And Lincoln seems very much – not to want that to be the case, as it were.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: No “Daughters of the American Revolution.” Or what was it? They did set up that organization after the Civil War actually, whatever it was the Grand Army, or something, you know, which was sort of veteran’s organization to lobby for benefits for Civil War veterans. But he, this cuts very much against all of that, I think.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: You don't have to be physically in Gettysburg. You don't have to –

SCHAUB: Right, you just have to subscribe to *this* understanding of *that* nation.

KRISTOL: Right. I do think it makes it possible for people you know to memorize in public schools in New York in the 1930s when very few of those people's parents were – or grandparents – were around in 1863, you know?

SCHAUB: Also the fact that it contains only 130 distinct words. So there are 272 words in the speech, but only 130 distinct words. So many words are repeated. That's another kind of structural element of the speech is the repetition of certain words, especially the word here, "Here, here, here, here, here" and repetition of words like "dedicate" and "consecrate," "nation."

KRISTOL: It makes it easier to memorize, among other things though.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I mean both the brevity and the repetition involved.

SCHAUB: Yeah, although there are some unusual things with the syntax that can make it difficult to memorize accurately. So the placement of the "here's" is sometimes a little bit unusual. And the placement of words like "rather" is a little bit unusual.

So Lincoln was a very good grammarian. He was a terrible speller, but he was a very good grammarian.

KRISTOL: Was that right? He was a bad speller?

SCHAUB: Yeah, he was a bad speller because that's just conventional, but grammar is logical, and so he's very interested in grammar.

KRISTOL: Oh, that's interesting.

SCHAUB: And there are – Maybe we can just do that, the funny grammar thing that he does in the second paragraph here. So if you look at the subjects of the sentences, right, "now we are engaged," "we are met," "we have come to dedicate." So it's "we, we, we." And then you have the concluding "it." "It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this." This is something called a dummy "it," or an anticipatory "it." So the subject that it stands in for "that we should do this." That we should do this is altogether fitting and proper. And, again, it's such a "do this," right? He doesn't use words like cemetery for instance, right? It's just "field" and "resting place."

So the effect of this grammatical structure is actually to throw the weight of the sentence on the word that comes after the verb. The word that comes after the verb is "altogether". "It is altogether," so it actually – the way the emphasis works is "we, we, we, altogether."

KRISTOL: Yeah.

SCHAUB: It's a beat that has an effect on you, right? Even though he's using altogether not to mean all of us together, right? But I think it creates that sense that we are all in this together. "We, we, we, altogether."

KRISTOL: I've always been struck that that last sentence is – I mean it's not obvious why it's there and the speech would read fine without the last sentence, in fact it would read a little better in a funny way because it goes from we've come to dedicate a portion of this field, and then the third paragraph begins, "But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate." So I'd say it's an obtrusive sentence.

SCHAUB: It's an interjection in a way.

KRISTOL: Yes.

SCHAUB: Yeah. I think he has to do that because he wants to say, well, he has to do it because the third paragraph actually reverses direction.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: The “but” means I’m taking back what I just said.

KRISTOL: Okay.

SCHAUB: And so he has to say “it is fitting and proper that we should do this,” right? It is right to be here acknowledging our debt to the dead soldiers, to their sacrifice, their blood sacrifice. So I think he feels he has to give them that, but he’s going to pivot in the next paragraph.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that’s not I think usually noticed. Let’s go to the next –

SCHAUB: Yeah, I have argued in print that this is the most significant use of the word “but” in the English language.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: So, elementary school teachers tell you not to start a sentence with but, certainly not to start a paragraph with but, but Lincoln does it. So why does he do it? And I think this points to the, to the real problem that he’s addressing.

So there’s the problem of national survival, there’s the problem of the survival of popular government, but there is the problem that he is facing as president, and that’s the problem of Northern morale, the problem of grief. So at Gettysburg you have the Union dead are 3,500, there are more Confederate dead, and there are 50,000 casualties. It’s the highest casualty rate of the war. One-third of the fighting men on the field were casualties in that battle – dead, wounded, missing.

And this is not just, you know, one week, but week, after week, after week, the drumbeat of these horrific battles. Right after the victory at Gettysburg, the New York Draft Riots breakout and there are I think 120 dead in the New York Draft Riots. And the Gettysburg – the veterans of Gettysburg have to be sent north, they’re taken off the quest for Lee and sent north to quell the disturbances in New York City. There were those who said that the draft riots turned the victory at Gettysburg into a Confederate victory.

So this is a war speech that has to rally the nation. So it’s rather what like, in a certain way what Pericles does in the “Funeral Oration,” there is this problem of grief. And so he as gently as he can has to tell the mourners that they cannot do what they came to do. They can’t do what they came to do if they remain there tarrying among the graves. Right? Lamentation is not what is called for. So in larger sense “we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground,” right. They did it. The brave men, they have consecrated it.

Then the statement that we’ve already discussed about the world, right. And then he goes back to that same grammatical formulation. “It is” right? That deferred “it.” “It is for *us* the living rather,” right? The two “rathers” in the final two sentences, pick up the “but,” he’s still in that sort of adversative mode.

And the effect of the, of the deferred it is to put the emphasis on what comes after the verb. In other words, “for us.” That’s where the emphasis is, it is *for us*, the living, “rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.” “It is rather for *us* to be here dedicated.” So he really is using his sophisticated knowledge of grammar to move the audience.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's good. The "but." Well, let's just finish that up, then I want to come back for a minute to the larger sense. Because that can't just be about the morale, the North though in November of 1863. I guess because the speech also has that so much longer horizon, so to speak.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Isn't he also sort of qualifying, as you said earlier, what's come before? "It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense –" That's a very, he doesn't have to say that, right?

SCHAUB: Yeah, maybe he doesn't want to be so bald-faced in saying you can't do what you came here to do.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: That's a bit of a slap in the face to them. But you're right that this, I think it does point forward to the current generation, which means also to every current generation that reads this speech. So that's part of the larger sense. I mean, you can see this all the way back in "The Lyceum Address." No generation wants to think of itself of the epigones, right. The, the task of self-government must be ongoing.

KRISTOL: And almost more even of a task now. Or as much certainly, maybe more though, than at the beginning. That's very consistent with "Lyceum."

SCHAUB: Yeah, that's why eventually "The Lyceum Address," it seems to me, argues that the task of perpetuation is a higher task, a more difficult task, than the task of founding.

KRISTOL: So in a funny way, speaking of D-Day, as we did earlier, this in a way is the opposite of the Greatest Generation rhetoric, which I've always sort of thought was both wonderful and deserved tribute, but in a certain way problematic because it's sort of, "They were the greatest and of course we'll never do anything like D-Day." Which we probably, well, certainly won't, but you know, we're sort of doing our best also to keep the peace, you know, keep the world order together, and so forth.

But something, that's not quite right somehow for the point of view of, of democratic leadership.

SCHAUB: Yeah, because it was a kind of necessity that they were facing.

KRISTOL: Right, but you don't want to be too nostalgic is what I'm saying. I mean Lincoln doesn't say, he could have said, "These are the greatest. We will never live up to their standards." That is a standard kind of thing to say at a cemetery, frankly, and often it's true, maybe true in this case incidentally.

You know, but it is very striking how forward looking he gets, if I can use that term in those last two sentences in particular.

SCHAUB: Yeah, yeah.

KRISTOL: At a dedication of a cemetery for a battlefield, which is unusual I'd say.

SCHAUB: Yeah, he's –

KRISTOL: And not just in some ritualistic way of "and therefore we have to do our best to keep," you know, the normal thing he might say – someone would say. But really as you say, "it is for us the living rather to be dedicated here." That "us the living" is really kind of startling when you think about it for a minute, right?

SCHAUB: Yeah, they're dead and gone.

KRISTOL: "The brave men living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it. But it's for us the living rather to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they fought here."

SCHAUB: Yes. So if we get to that last sentence maybe, the longest one, longer by a great deal than any of the other sentences here and quite complicated. In fact, there's a wonderful website that you can go to where you can see this sketched out. What do you call that when you do the sentence diagramming?

KRISTOL: Diagrams?

SCHAUB: Yes.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

SCHAUB: A sentence diagram of this lessons of "The Gettysburg Address", it's phenomenal. So, "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us. That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause –" So he's shifting to the cause, right.

The cause, "for which they gave the last full measure of devotion." So the first that dedication will do will be to increase devotion to the cause.

But then you get the three resolves. "That we here highly resolve." So that dedication and devotion have to turn into resolve, resolve three things. "That these dead shall not have died in vain." So that does look back to them, right, we don't want their sacrifice to be wasted.

Second, "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom." I'll have to talk about what that means and how it relates to the "conceived in liberty." And "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

So, two of these are "shall not's," so "They shall not have died in vain" and "so that government shall not perish, free government shall not perish from the earth." And one of them is a "shall," that "the nation shall have a new birth of freedom."

KRISTOL: Which is certainly the most powerful, the most emphatic of the three I would say.

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Or the most striking of the three, perhaps, right?

SCHAUB: Yeah.

KRISTOL: So that's this nation.

SCHAUB: Yeah, now we shifted from "that nation" to "this nation."

KRISTOL: Right. He inserted under God, I guess, in the late, in the drafting.

SCHAUB: He did, that does seems to be late, although in the final text that he supervised it was there.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: And it's there in all of the journalistic accounts.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: The transcriptions that were taken at the time.

KRISTOL: Yeah, yeah. So, “shall have a new birth.” So the “new birth of freedom,” that’s the most famous phrase in the speech I suppose.

SCHAUB: Yeah. Yeah, so if we try to tie this back to the first paragraph, one thing we might notice is this other structural element that is now clear, you began with language of birth, the whole middle section is about death and resting place and burial grounds, and then new birth of freedom.

So there’s a linear movement, but there’s also a cyclical movement – birth, death, rebirth, and possibly rebirth at a higher level. So a kind of perhaps Christian, Christian imagery of, of being born again.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: So, in the first paragraph what was born was the nation. It was a new nation, right.

KRISTOL: Right.

SCHAUB: But what’s born now is actually freedom.

KRISTOL: Oh, that’s good.

SCHAUB: It’s a new birth of freedom. Often we use liberty and freedom as synonyms. I think it’s possible that Lincoln is not simply using them as synonyms. There’s a reason he shifts from liberty to freedom. So if it’s now freedom that is actually born, how is that? What does that mean?

One thing that it means, the Emancipation Proclamation, it’s already been in effect for almost a year, and there are already great numbers of freedmen who are fighting for the Union, wearing the Union blue. And it’s clear that if the Union wins, slavery will be at an end, completely at an end.

So, partly the new birth of freedom is an extension of freedom. Four million new freedman. But I – So I think that’s part of its meaning. But I think it also means that if the nation succeeds in vindicating the majority principle and really showing that once you’ve agreed to be bound by ballots you must continue to be bound by ballots. There’s no recourse back to bullets, that that itself will be a new birth of freedom.

KRISTOL: Hmm.

SCHAUB: So that you could say that what the new birth of freedom does is to finally bring together what was a little bit separated in the first paragraph, or a little bit separated at the time of the Founding. Conceived in liberty, dedicated to equality, but those two things were not coterminous or completely at one with each other at the time of the Founding.

The new birth of freedom would now be, would now bring together liberty and equality. We would really be living out the principles of the Declaration in their intertwinedness, right. If you really understand what equality requires then you understand what consent means, and you have put consent on its proper foundation of the recognition of equality.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that’s good. We should bring this to a close here, and resume Lincoln in another conversation.

SCHAUB: [chuckles] Okay.

KRISTOL: Maybe get some thoughts on this, but then certainly the second inaugural and other things.

But why do you think it ends – I’ve always thought the – the end is beautifully – as a kind of matter of cadence it’s a beautiful ending, but it’s a little bit of a letdown almost –

SCHAUB: A downer.

KRISTOL: Don't you think? It's from the heights of" the new birth of freedom, a government of the people, by the people for the people shall not perish from the earth." Well that's great, but "shall not perish" is a fairly – it's not sort of, you know marching triumphantly into the future or something.

SCHAUB: Yeah, but this is part of Lincoln's conservatism. He always manages to be utterly conservative and utterly liberal, and to combine those in the proper balance. So there's the kind of balance of the "shall not's" and the "shall's."

KRISTOL: Mm-hmm.

SCHAUB: And it's not nothing for government of, by, and for the people to not perish. Right. That itself is, is highly, it's a high accomplishment.

We should maybe just say something about under God.

KRISTOL: Yeah, please.

SCHAUB: What we are to make of that, and whether that plays a role in the new birth of freedom or not? What would it mean for the nation to be under God? The reference to the divine in the first paragraph comes from the Declaration, "All men are created equal." There's a creator God, but that doesn't mean necessarily a providential god or a god that's active in human history.

Whereas, if the nation is now "under God," under the superintendence of God, and maybe God is now informing our sense of the limits of human freedom, that might enter into what a new birth of freedom would be. A kind of freedom that is not licensed to do anything, licensed to hold slaves for instance.

KRISTOL: Oh, that's good. That's good. Well that's actually an appropriate thing to end this conversation on because "under God" points forward to, points forward in that respect to the second inaugural –

SCHAUB: It does indeed.

KRISTOL: – which in so many ways is so different, I always think from Gettysburg. But obviously does have a real reflection on the whole question of politics under God.

SCHAUB: We'll do the theological-political question next time.

KRISTOL: Next time. Well I really look forward to it. Diana thanks so much for joining me today.

SCHAUB: Thanks Bill.

KRISTOL: And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]