

>> Peter Robinson: Welcome to "Uncommon Knowledge." I'm Peter Robinson. Follow us, by the way, on [Twitter.com/uncknowledge](https://twitter.com/uncknowledge). Our guest today is Dr. Harry Jaffa. According to Yale political scientist, Steven Smith, Harry Jaffa is, quote, "The greatest living scholar of Lincoln's political thought and Lincoln's greatest defender, period." Close quote. Now a distinguished fellow at the Claremont Institute, Dr. Jaffa majored in English at Yale, took his doctorate at The New School, where he studied with the legendary political philosopher, Leo Strauss. Fifty years ago, he published "Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates." And nine years ago, in 2000, he published the sequel, "A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War." In this 200th anniversary year since the birth of Abraham Lincoln, Professor Jaffa, welcome. Segment one, "1800 and 1860." You begin "A New Birth of Freedom" by contrasting these two election years, 1800 and 1860, possibly the most contentious in American history. Quote, "Why did those --" Quoting you in "New Birth of Freedom," "Why did those who failed to carry the Presidential election of 1860 not accept the outcome, as did the defeated Federalists of 1800?" But you called the fact that the Federalists in 1800 accepted that outcome an astounding precedent. So let's begin with 1800. Why did they accept -- why did the defeated Federalists -- Adams versus Jefferson. Jefferson wins. Adams goes quietly home to Massachusetts and accepts the result.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, the -- one of the points that I make is that, to the best of my knowledge, the election of 1800 in the United States was the first time in human history that a government changed hands on the basis of a free election. It had never happened before.

>> Peter Robinson: It had never happened before.

>> Harry Jaffa: So the -- the reason why the election of the 1790s was so intense is that no one really knew whether the election would decide the question, whether the losers -- in the ancient world, if you were a loser, you got killed or exiled, or you overthrew the government. There was no real theory, which made the majority in a popular election the decisive factor. And it was, of course, the majority by itself -- it was not itself sufficient. Jefferson -- there was nobody who was more -- what shall I say -- seemed more reluctant to accept the possibility of a Federalist victory in 1800 than Jefferson. But it was Jefferson who drew the lesson that he himself did not draw before the election when he said, "We are all Federalists. We are all Republicans. Not every difference of opinion is a difference of principle." But he left open the question, if there was a difference of principle, could you accept the victory of the other side?

>> Peter Robinson: Which takes us to 1860, quoting you again. "How could a people bred in the cause of Union and Republicanism have come to such a pass?" The pass being the election of 1860, where 10 states refused even to put Lincoln or his electors on their ballot.

>> Harry Jaffa: Um-hum.

>> Peter Robinson: And then, of course, Lincoln is elected and the South secedes.

>> Harry Jaffa: Yes. Well, I'd say that there are two factors. One is the industrial revolution. The -- in 1793, with the invention of the cotton gin, the cultivation of cotton became enormously important, not merely to the United States but to the whole Western world. The same year the power loom was invented, and Adam Smith published about the nations.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: But the value of slave labor was enormously increased, and slavery receives a tremendous impetus by the fact that, you know, that the cotton economy was the most vital economy, the most vital production in the whole Western world. The other thing that happened parallel to this, and in the long run, more important, was that fact that the ideal of nature. Remember the Declaration of Independence appeals to the laws of nature and of nature's God.

>> Peter Robinson: Yes.

>> Harry Jaffa: And this belief was supplanted. Nature was replaced by history. And in April of 1861, halfway between Lincoln's inauguration and the firing on Fort Sumter, the Vice President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens -- his real name was Alexander Hamilton Stephens, and Jefferson Davis' real was Thomas Jefferson Davis; so Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton were President and Vice President of the Confederacy -- he made a speech in which he said that at the time of the founding the belief in the equality of races was almost universal. And the concessions made to slavery in the Constitution of 1787 were reasonable guarantees, but the expectation was that in the course of time, slavery would whither away and die.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: "But," said Stephens, "we know better. They were wrong. The progress of science has taught us of the inequality of the races. And we in the Confederate States of America is the first nation built upon this." This was called his "Cornerstone" speech. And the cornerstone phrase is, thinking of the New Testament, and the cornerstone in the Gospels is Jesus Christ. So Jesus Christ becomes this symbol of slavery. And so we -- so the -- slavery was regarded as, at best, a necessary evil in 1776. By 1860, a large part of the country, North as well as South, believed that slavery was a benign institution and supported by both God and history.

>> Peter Robinson: Segment two, "Ordained by God." Again, I quote you in "A New Birth of Freedom." Quote, "For both Jefferson and Lincoln, a regime in which the majority alone may rule is nonetheless a regime sharply circumscribed by a moral order ordained by God." Close quote.

>> Harry Jaffa: Yeah.

>> Peter Robinson: Explain.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well --

>> Peter Robinson: How is this continuity from Jefferson to Lincoln in "A Crisis --" in your first book, "Crisis of a House Divided," you weren't so sure there was account that Lincoln is the one who sees clearly --

>> Harry Jaffa: Yes, right.

>> Peter Robinson: -- That the moral order must circumscribe popular sovereignty.

>> Harry Jaffa: Yeah, well, I think I -- a little while ago I quoted Jefferson's, "Can the liberties of a people be thought secure when we abolish their only sure foundation, the belief they are of the gift of God and may not be violated but with his wrath?" That was Jefferson's opinion. That's what Lincoln expressed in his second inaugural.

>> Peter Robinson: All right, now, this leads to a pretty tricky question, I think. We'll see if you find it tricky. I have a feeling you'll give my - you'll grade my questions down. William F. Buckley said that in passing, Whitaker Chambers once remarked that Democracy was a political reading of the Bible. And you quote in "A New Birth of Freedom," a famous Catholic writer, Bert Cochran, who writes that: "If it was inevitable that if civilization became Christian, two results must follow: the substitution of free labor for free slave labor and the erection of free institutions on the ruins of despotic institutions in government." So the question to you, Dr. Jaffa, is do you see Democracy as a specifically Judeo-Christian development? And then of course, the obvious second question is can it exist once faith in Judaism and Christianity dissipates?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, I would say it -- the Judeo-Christian -- but Judaism and Christianity, at some point in their development, became founded in reason the will of God. So the Judeo-Christian religion understood, at the face, a triumphant success of reason as well as the faith. And I would say that the God of the Declaration of Independence, the essence of God is known by reason because the Declaration, by saying that all men are created equal, distinguishes the equality of human beings as members of a species from the beasts, which are below, and from God, who is above. Jefferson, in the last letter he wrote, put something which was traditional in English political theory that it is now no longer that some men are -- or it is thought that some men are born with saddles are on their back, and others booted in spurs to ride them. So the rule of a rider over his horse is according to nature. The rule of a rider over another rider is against nature. And God is the author of nature, and the legitimacy of rule depends upon recognizing the order that God himself has anointed by distinguishing between man and beast.

>> Peter Robinson: All right.

>> Harry Jaffa: This is all in that book there.

>> Peter Robinson: A little smaller bore. Smaller bore -- all in "The New Birth of Freedom."

>> Harry Jaffa: Yeah.

>> Peter Robinson: Smaller bore question. Then if you see Western Europe, where you see the collapse of religious practice, does that concern you for the political institutions over time?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, if you have studied Marxism, as I did exhaustively many years ago, you know that the didactical materialism and all that egalitarian apparatus is all-important in how Marx's theory was [inaudible], but the aim of Marxism is a revolution which will lead to what he calls "the leap into freedom," which is literally a leap into nothing. But the great enemy of human well being, according to Marx, is morality. The society of the future is one in which the moral distinctions based upon the Judeo-Christian and Greek tradition have all dissolved, see? We are moving into a communist world. We are moving into the world that Marx wanted without having -- without our knowing it and without having the kind of revolution that Marx predicted and thought was necessary. This is shown, for example, in almost all -- the Secretary of State, the President, they all talk about our values. And what do they mean by values? It means moral choices, which have no objective basis. Value is a subjective desire, not an objective truth. They don't know what they're saying. They don't know the importance of it. But 100 years ago, nobody would have spoken about our principles as being values. George Washington said, "The basis of our policy will be laid in the immutable principles of private morality." You said to Washington, you mean your values? What the hell are you talking about?

>> Peter Robinson: Back to Lincoln, "A New Birth of Freedom." You've spent a lifetime thinking about this man. Let me ask a couple of obvious questions about him.

>> Harry Jaffa: Okay.

>> Peter Robinson: One is how did he do it? April 12th, Confederates -- he takes office on March 4, 1861. April 12, the Confederates open fire on Fort Sumter. April 14, the Union garrison surrenders. April 15th, Lincoln calls up 75,000 men. April 27th, he suspends habeas corpus in Maryland. He moves very fast, and this is within weeks of his taking office. You write in "A New Birth of Freedom," "Lincoln's reaction to the attack on Fort Sumter was as electrifying as the attack itself." Where did this come from? When he was 23, he spent a few weeks running around the wilds of Illinois in what came to be called the "Black Hawk War." And that is his total military experience. Within weeks of becoming president, he's conducting a war of major proportions.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, it's obvious, isn't it? From through moment of his election, and from that moment that secession began, he had to think of what -- how the union was to be preserved. And Buchanan --

>> Peter Robinson: His predecessor.

>> Harry Jaffa: -- Shilly-shallied and said -- he said this -- Buchanan and Lincoln completely agreed on the illegality of secession, but Buchanan said that Congress has got to decide. I can't do anything on my own. Lincoln understood that. And it's interesting that all those things that you mention, he did without the authority of Congress, but when he called Congress into special session, he said, "Now pass laws authorizing what I've already done." But he said there was no -- are you gonna preserve the Union or not? And he thought through what was necessary, and he did it. And he might have surprised himself as well, but the fact of the matter is he knew that the -- remember, when Alexander Stephens gave his Cornerstone speech in the middle of --

>> Peter Robinson: Vice President of the Confederacy.

>> Harry Jaffa: Right. There was no war. Sumter hadn't been fired on. And as far as Stephens was concerned, and all the whole Confederate government, which was all in place -- remember, Jefferson Davis was inaugurated two weeks before Abraham Lincoln.

>> Peter Robinson: Right. [Inaudible].

>> Harry Jaffa: It was an operating thing. The question of now we have to take action against something in which they have all the advantages, you might say. And one of the things I hoped to make clearer, even in that book, and if I live long enough to write another book on Lincoln, is that any odds maker who knew the facts in 1861 would have said the Confederates have got all the odds on their side.

>> Peter Robinson: Yes, you make this point that --

>> Harry Jaffa: Yeah.

>> Peter Robinson: -- These days we tend to hear about the Northern industry --

>> Harry Jaffa: Yeah.

>> Peter Robinson: -- the larger population, bigger industrial base, more railroad tracks. Of course, the North was going to win. And you say no, no, no, no.

>> Harry Jaffa: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: It was not at all clear that the North was going to win.

>> Harry Jaffa: No. But in the first place, winning for the South meant not being defeated. Winning for the Union meant wiping out the military force of the Confederacy.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: It's much harder to annihilate -- and remember, the land area of the Confederacy was much larger than that of the -- at least of the continuous states of the Union.

>> Peter Robinson: With Texas, right. You write, if I may again quote you, "A New Birth of Freedom," "The worst that could have happened in the weeks ahead -- " This is after the dispute over Fort Sumter becomes red hot. " -- Would be for the authorities, Confederate authorities in Charleston, to invite the Fort Sumter garrison to remain as their guests. As time passed, and the two governments lived side-by-side, it would have become extremely difficult for Lincoln not to have acquiesced in a peaceful separation." How would the world be different if that had happened, if the Civil War had not been fought?"

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, how different would the world have been if the Southern United States was on the side of Hitler?

>> Peter Robinson: Is that what would have happened?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, I mean, we're making all sorts of assumptions.

>> Peter Robinson: No. But that's --

>> Harry Jaffa: [Inaudible].

>> Peter Robinson: Well, I have a great mind sitting opposite me. I want to see it work.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well --

>> Peter Robinson: To play around a little bit.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, see, it -- the general history of the Western civilization, particularly Western thought from 17th or the 18th century to the 20th or 21st century, looks upon it in the light of the idea of progress. And Darwinism gave a great boost to the idea of progress. And the Constitution -- the people who believe in a living Constitution are basically neo-Darwinians because they say we're moving higher and higher. We know that slavery was wrong; they didn't know it. We know that capital punishment is wrong; they didn't know it. And so the idea of the combination of Hegel and Darwin created a -- whose roots, by the way, are in Rousseau, which I've said a lot about. Calhoun was a neo-[inaudible], but he was more so a disciple of Rousseau. So the belief in the idea of progress has, to a large extent, obscured the fact that Communism and Nazism are examples of the thought that was emerging from over those centuries. We tend to think of liberal Democracy as messenger of the fate of the progressive movement. Liberal Democracy is the wave of the future.

>> Peter Robinson: Right. Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: And then along came somebody who said no. The wave of the future is National Socialist. And the Nazi theories, the Nazi race theories, they're rooted in 19th century liberal thought. So the fact --

>> Peter Robinson: So the notion that one hears from time to time that by 1920, slavery would have attenuated and been -- that it -- the Civil war was a terrible waste. If the North had just held on and waited six decades, seven decades, it would all have withered away to nothing, and all these millions who gave their lives would have been --

>> Harry Jaffa: Listen, in the 1920s in this country, when I was growing up --

>> Peter Robinson: Yes.

>> Harry Jaffa: -- Racism was far more virulent than it was in Germany before Hitler.

>> Peter Robinson: Right. Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: So race theory with an outcome of the 19th century progressive thought was -- but the [inaudible] --

>> Peter Robinson: From an intellect, there is no reason to suppose that the South wasn't the wave of the future.

>> Harry Jaffa: Absolutely.

>> Peter Robinson: All right.

>> Harry Jaffa: And I should -- and on the subject of race, by the way, even in the Abolitionist movement, there was never any question but that Negroes were inferior.

>> Peter Robinson: Right. Segment four here, "From the 19th century to the 20th. Actually, we're ranging over millennia. You write of the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s as the great Civil Rights Acts, and yet there was only one politician with whom you worked very closely.

>> Harry Jaffa: Um-hum.

>> Peter Robinson: His name was Barry Goldwater, and as a member of the United States Senate, he voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

>> Harry Jaffa: Um-hum.

>> Peter Robinson: Dr. Jaffa, explain yourself.

>> Harry Jaffa: Okay. Well, I'll mention that in 1959, according to Dick -- what's his name -- the National Review editor who just published a book on the Buckley -- on Buckley?

>> Peter Robinson: Oh, Rick Brookhiser.

>> Harry Jaffa: Rick Brookhiser.

>> Peter Robinson: Yes.

>> Harry Jaffa: He said that in -- he quoted Buckley in 1959 as -- a quotation, which is pure Southern racism.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: And he said [inaudible] that Buckley --

>> Peter Robinson: It was the white race to prevail, I think is --

>> Harry Jaffa: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: That's a rough paraphrase of Bill's positions.

>> Harry Jaffa: But then he did 180 degrees on the basis of my influence. Well, I didn't have --

>> Peter Robinson: So you're saying -- what you're saying is you got to Goldwater a little too late? Or --

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, I didn't get to him at all as far as that was -- now, in the first place, his Constitutional objections had some substance to them.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: And if things had gone the way reasons would have said they should have gone, the Voting Rights Act of '65 should have come first because there was no question as to the constitutionality of that. And basing the --

>> Peter Robinson: Goldwater -- nobody had trouble with the '65 Act.

>> Harry Jaffa: I don't think --

>> Peter Robinson: Some Southerners did, but Goldwater didn't.

>> Harry Jaffa: I don't think so.

>> Peter Robinson: Right. All right.

>> Harry Jaffa: But in any case, the -- my reason for changing my registration from Democrat to Republican, I did that after the Bay of Pigs, when I was disgusted with Kennedy for having -- he -- and the missile crisis was a direct result of his meeting with Khrushchev --

>> Peter Robinson: Khrushchev in Vienna.

>> Harry Jaffa: -- In Vienna. And so -- and I was looking for a political movement which would oppose Communism abroad and Socialism at home.

>> Peter Robinson: And in 1964 Barry Goldwater delivered an acceptance speech at the Cow Palace, right here up the road in San Francisco at the GOP Convention, in which he uttered the words, "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." Which, if I may say so, strikes me as wonderful writing, but politically at the time, it was considered a terrible mistake that made people very jittery and helped and contributed to the landslide of Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well --

>> Peter Robinson: And the person who wrote that phrase is --

>> Harry Jaffa: Yes, I did. I did it.

>> Peter Robinson: -- Is Harry Jaffa.

>> Harry Jaffa: Absolutely.

>> Peter Robinson: Any regrets?

>> Harry Jaffa: No. I never wrote another speech for a president.

>> Peter Robinson: That was the end of that career.

>> Harry Jaffa: I says -- I made of joke of the fact. I told Ronald Reagan if he was running for president, I wouldn't write any speeches for him.

>> Peter Robinson: That would be your main contribution.

>> Harry Jaffa: Right. No, but -- and first that this contributed to Goldwater's defeat, I think is simply not true. I said that if Ronald Reagan had been the candidate in 1964, he wouldn't have gotten any more votes than [inaudible]. And if Goldwater had been the candidate in 1980, he would have got the same votes as Ronald Reagan. In 1964, you had, first of all, the assassination --

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: And the -- also, and the Kennedy tax cuts. The country was prosperous. The Vietnam War was still a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. So we had peace, prosperity, and that --

>> Peter Robinson: And nobody wanted a third president within two years.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, and Johnson, of course, was the first Southerner in the White House, so that really tore up the basis [inaudible] in the South.

>> Peter Robinson: Right. You had the South and the liberal North.

>> Harry Jaffa: Incidentally, Reagan, in 1983, made a speech at Ashland College in Ohio at the Ashbrook Center, and I think it was a year after John Ashbrook had died, this promising, young Republican, and -- in which he said that the principles of his administration were taken directly from the Goldwater campaign. And he ended by quoting the speech that I wrote.

>> Peter Robinson: Segment five, "The Present Crisis." From a recent essay by Harry Jaffa. "Scalia --" you're referring to Mr. Justice Antonin Scalia -- "Scalia says that it is up to the majority to decide whether or not abortion should be lawful. One could substitute the word "slavery" for "abortion" to see that there is no difference between Scalia's majoritarianism and the popular sovereignty doctrine of Senator Stephen A. Douglas."

>> Harry Jaffa: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: You are the only person who could connect Antonin Scalia with Stephen A. Douglas. "Lincoln thought slavery was wrong. He did not think that a vote of the people could make it right. Conservatism suffers from the same nihilism and post-modernism that dominate liberalism and that suppress dissent on our campuses." Close quote. Now, can I, first of all, give you an opportunity to say you were just feeling especially feisty that day?

>> Harry Jaffa: No.

>> Peter Robinson: You're not -- you really want to maintain that Antonin Scalia is a Nihilist?

>> Harry Jaffa: I'm saying that -- you see, the whole theory of Democracy is majority rule. That's the whole theory. If people want to have abortion, then abortion should be legal. If they think it should be illegal, it should be. Now, I'm not saying that he's not a good Catholic or any [inaudible]. But that's -- those statements, by themselves, are nihilistic. They say there's no foundation for the decision. And to say that there's no basis for majority rule says there's no basis for human rule of any kind, whether it's majority or Aristocracy or whatever.

>> Peter Robinson: Your essay concludes, "We have to return the conservative movement to its roots in the political thought of the American founders and Abraham Lincoln. Nothing is at stake but the salvation of Western civilization."

>> Harry Jaffa: Well --

>> Peter Robinson: How? How, how, how do you return any significant portion of the American people, let alone the -- a particular political movement? Let's just start with 18-year olds who are headed off to college in September. How do you return a people to the thought of the founders and of Abraham Lincoln?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, I'm doing my best. And I'm not insane enough to believe that my efforts -- on the other hand, if we look at human history, some great men have -- and some men who are not great -- have had great influences if they happen to -- if chance works in their behalf.

>> Peter Robinson: So I guess what I'm asking for here -- well, look, we've got -- a question I have to ask, of course, is what would Abraham Lincoln have made of Barack Obama? And the under -- I'm just gonna dump a bunch of questions and let you sort them and answer them in any order you want to. The other question is are you arguing that nihilism doesn't work, that over some period of time that at least is brief enough to save the country, there is some kind of self-correcting mechanism? I think Milton Friedman would have said you raise taxes high enough and people will see that it doesn't work, and they'll vote to lower taxes. You're talking about something much, much deeper, the very premises of the civilization itself. Will people come to their senses because no alternative will work right? Or are you saying no, that's not necessarily the case. It's an act of will and discipline and intellect?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, Milton Friedman, a man whom I admire greatly, is an example of nihilism himself because he does not believe in the objective existence of morality. His support for the repeal of the drug wars -- I mean, he's got a good argument that the drug wars don't work, but at the same time, he himself doesn't think there's any objective basis for anybody imposing their morality on somebody else. Any -- that's the Libertarian economics, which is implicitly amoral.

>> Peter Robinson: So how do we return? How do we save ourselves?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, the -- what is the root of -- the institutional root of evil in our -- in the world in which we inhabit. There's no question but that it's in the universities. That's where this teaching begins. That's where the high school and grade school teachers -- so they go to college, and they learn that morality is subjective, and they think that's the sophisticated thing to say. And --

>> Peter Robinson: Hold on. I have to reel that back for you and let you see -- and let think about whether you want to stand with it. The institutional root of evil -- you used the word evil -- in the world we now inhabit, there's no question, it's the universities.

>> Harry Jaffa: Absolutely.

>> Peter Robinson: You're gonna stick with that?

>> Harry Jaffa: Yes.

>> Peter Robinson: All right.

>> Harry Jaffa: I wrote a pamphlet on homosexuality and the natural law some years ago. And included in it was a dialog, which I claimed to have -- I didn't claim to, I pretended that I found a tape that Ted Bundy had made of a dialog with one of his victims before he murdered her, in which she pleads for her life and says that her parents and her friends would give any sum of money to save her. And he says but you don't understand. I don't want money. I just want the pleasure of raping and murdering you. And she says well didn't you -- don't you believe in the moral law? Don't you believe that God prohibits such things? And he says I used to believe that until I took my first college course in philosophy. Then -- wait a minute -- then -- he says then I learned that all moral judgments are value judgments. And value judgments have no foundation in reason, and that a moral choice is simply the thing that you believe in most of all. And what I believe in most of all is the pleasure that I get from raping and murdering you.

>> Peter Robinson: From which argument there is no appeal.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well --

>> Peter Robinson: Last question --

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, that's an example --

>> Peter Robinson: Okay, of the reasoning.

>> Harry Jaffa: And Bundy, in this context, quotes from a Harvard --

>> Peter Robinson: Are you an anomaly? Are you simply a survivor of an earlier and a better intellectual age? Or do you see, when you survey the university scene in this country, young Harry Jaffas, young Leo Strausses, coming along who have at least the prospect either of transforming the scene, or at least of keeping some -- doing what the monasteries did in the middle age -- at least keeping reason alive. How do you view yourself?

>> Harry Jaffa: Monasteries kept all that reason alive if they --

>> Peter Robinson: That's a -- let's not press that one. In fact, let's not press it at all. I'll just take -- I will retract that one.

>> Harry Jaffa: Sure.

>> Peter Robinson: Do you see yourself as an anomaly, as someone who has simply -- a visitor from an earlier and a better world?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, I don't -- I like the world I'm living in. I think that it's a world which has enabled me to live a good life and my family. And I've had access to students. And that article about me in the "Review of Politics" mentions that, you know, I didn't -- they said I've influenced a whole generation of students.

>> Peter Robinson: Generations. Plural.

>> Harry Jaffa: Yeah, well maybe. I didn't know that, but if it's true, I -- then maybe I've been more successful than I know. But what --

>> Peter Robinson: Last question then. What would Abraham Lincoln have made of Barack Obama; this man to whom you've devoted so much of your life?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, one of the -- I've watched and read a lot of Obama's speeches, and they were -- by the way, there's an article by Charles Kessler on Obama in the CRB, which is excellent.

>> Peter Robinson: Claremont Review of Books.

>> Harry Jaffa: Right. What -- Obama's success [inaudible] representing himself as appealing to a higher principle than other politicians, and particularly ordinary politician. He claimed to represent something much higher, which transcended the conflicts, which obstructed the reforms that he [inaudible] were necessary. He never said what that higher principle was. If he'd have appealed to the Declaration of Independence, he would have been doing -- but he didn't even know of the existence of the Declaration of Independence. He just appealed to something higher, and claimed -- and he --

>> Peter Robinson: Well, perhaps that's good as far as it goes. He represents an urge, a hunger, for something higher.

>> Harry Jaffa: Yes.

>> Peter Robinson: Even if he can't take people quite to it.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, the question is what is it that he's taking them to? Adolf Hitler also appealed to something higher.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Harry Jaffa: And I'm not sure that Obama --as far as I can tell, programmatically, he gets his ideas from the Democratic left, which --

>> Peter Robinson: Perfectly conventional left liberal.

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, it's not so conventional. It's basically -- it's Marxism transformed into the lingo of today.

>> Peter Robinson: All right. What -- "Crisis of the House Divided," "New Birth of Freedom," Last sentence. What should an 18-year old, headed to college in September know about Abraham Lincoln?

>> Harry Jaffa: Well, if he reads -- begins with "Crisis of the House Divided," he'll --

>> Peter Robinson: He'll know plenty. All right.

>> Harry Jaffa: I can -- I can -- I've got my 25-cent lecture and my 50-cent lecture, and --

>> Peter Robinson: Okay, this book is -- well, on Amazon, I think you can get it for a little under \$20.00. Harry Jaffa, author of "A New Birth of Freedom," thank you for joining us. For "Uncommon Knowledge" and the Hoover Institution, I'm Peter Robinson.