



American Heritage Discussion Series: Learners with Littles
Study Guide for Session III:
Interpreting the Founding at the Civil War

Overall Essential Question—How were American founding ideals and the U.S. Constitution interpreted at the Civil War?

Calhoun’s Error in “all men created equal” speech—Essential Question: Why does Calhoun reject the principles of natural liberty and natural equality as articulated in the Declaration of Independence?

- What does Calhoun mean, exactly, when he says that liberty is a “reward” or a “prize to be won”?

Douglass’ What to a Slave is the Fourth of July speech—Essential Question: What is Douglass’ interpretation of the Constitution regarding slavery?

- From where does Douglass say he draws hope regarding the future of slavery?

Lincoln’s Cooper Union Address—Essential Question: According to Lincoln, did the Framers in the Constitutional Convention think slavery could be restrained or limited by the federal government?

- How does Lincoln prove his points about whether the federal government has the power to limit slavery in the territories?
- Does Lincoln agree with the Supreme Court’s decision *Dred Scott* that the right to hold a human as enslaved property is in the Constitution?

Stephens’ Corner Stone Address —Essential Question: Alexander Stephens believes the American founders were wrong about slavery. What does he say to support his position?

- Alexander Stephens called the secession of seven states from the Union to form the Confederate States of America as a revolution. How does this line of thinking compare to the American Revolution?

- According to Alexander Stephens, what was the “immediate cause” of some states withdrawing from the Union and forming the Confederate States of America?
- When the Confederate States of America seceded, they adopted a new constitution that clearly protected slavery. What does Alexander Stephens say about the new constitution?
- According to Alexander Stephens, how does the new Confederate constitution improve on the U.S. Constitution?
- How does Alexander Stephens describe how the American founders thought about slavery?
- What does Alexander Stephens say the new government (Confederate government) is founded upon? In other words, what is the cornerstone?
- What does Alexander Stephens mean when he says, “They were attempting to make things equal which the Creator had made unequal.”
- How does Alexander Stephens describe the intention of the Creator in creating a superior race and an inferior race?
- When Alexander Stephens says, “This stone which was rejected by the first builders “is become the chief of the corner”—the real “corner-stone”—in our new edifice.” What is “this stone”?

Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address —Essential Question: How does Lincoln interpret the meaning of founding ideals at the time of the Civil War?

- What is the significance of describing the United States as “conceived in liberty”?
- What is the significance of using the word proposition when describing the ideal of human equality in America?
- What does Lincoln say will happen if the Union does not win the Civil War? Do you agree with this assertion?