



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 is Calhoun's motivation for arguing that the phrase in the Declaration of Independence "all men are created equal" is wrong?
- What does Calhoun mean 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?

- How does Douglass interpret American founding ideals to oppose slavery?
- What does Douglass think of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. 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?

- How does Alexander Stephens describe the views of the American founders concerning slavery?
- What does Alexander Stephens say the new government (Confederate States of America) is founded upon? In other words, what is the cornerstone?
- 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 does he mean?

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