

## Interpretive Questions for Discussion

### **Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address**

1. In his second inaugural address, why does Lincoln adopt the attitude of “judge not that we be not judged,” even though he believes slavery to be an offense to God?
2. Why doesn't Lincoln feel triumphant regarding the successful course of the war? Why does he make no predictions about the war's outcome, but only express “high hope” for the future?
3. According to Lincoln, did the North “accept” war because of its wish to preserve the Union, or because of its abhorrence of slavery?
4. Does Lincoln blame the South for causing the war?
5. Why does Lincoln point out that “the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement” of slavery? Is he suggesting that, in so compromising, the North was trying any means possible to avert bloodshed, or avoiding its moral responsibility?
6. According to Lincoln, why were people who had so much in common—even praying to the same God—unable to avoid such a terrible conflict?
7. Why does Lincoln suggest that both North and South are being punished by God for the offense of American slavery?
8. Why does Lincoln avoid calling for vengeance against the side who “would make war rather than let the nation survive”?
9. Why does Lincoln think that, rather than a detailed speech outlining a course of action for the next four years, a brief statement about the sin of slavery and his wish that the nation bear “malice toward none” is the appropriate subject for his address?

### **Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I Have a Dream”**

1. What do you think King meant when he said that “all men are created equally?”
2. What other reasons could King have had, aside from racism, for writing this speech?
3. How does King's allusion of “a great American” suit both the location and the occasion of King's speech?
4. Why does King use an analogy between a financial transaction and the idea of justice?
5. What message does King convey through his quote from the song “My Country 'Tis of Thee”?
6. How does the mention of part of the United States support King's central idea and purpose?

### **Looking at both texts**

1. Do Lincoln and King share a philosophy of how to combat racial injustice?

2. Why does Lincoln say that everyone involved in the Civil War knew that slavery was “somehow” the cause of the conflict? Is he suggesting that racial injustice is a deeply complex issue or that most people find it a difficult problem to face?
3. What does Lincoln mean when he says that both sides in the war “looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding”?

**For Further Reflection**

1. Are Americans as deeply divided today as in the time of Lincoln? As in the time of Dr. King?
2. Would Americans today wage war on each other in order to preserve the Union from division?
3. Why do you think “I Have a Dream” has lived on as one of the best-known speeches in modern history? Do you think it deserves this standing?
4. Is it time for Americans to forgive each other for past injustices and “judge not that we be not judged”?
5. Do our leaders today lack a moral core? Do we romanticize past leaders, or do we really not have leaders today of the caliber of Lincoln and Dr. King?
6. Even though separation of church and state is a hallmark of American democracy, do our leaders need faith in God to see the nation through times of crisis?