In 1861, eleven Southern states seceded from the United States. Jefferson Davis, formerly a senator from Mississippi, was appointed President of their new government, the Confederate States of America. In this excerpt from his inaugural address, he cites passages from both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to defend the formation of the Confederate States of America.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Drawing Conclusions

What does this speech reveal about specific grievances, goals, and values of the Confederate States of America?
trade which our necessities will permit. It is alike our interest and that of all those to whom we would sell, and from whom we would buy, that there should be the fewest practicable restrictions upon the interchange of these commodities. There can, however, be but little rivalry between ours and any manufacturing or navigating community, such as the Northeastern States of the American Union. It must follow, therefore, that mutual interest will invite to good will and kind offices on both parts. If, however, passion or lust of dominion should cloud the judgment or inflame the ambition of those States, we must prepare to meet the emergency and maintain, by the final arbitrament of the sword, the position which we have assumed among the nations of the earth.

We have entered upon the career of independence, and it must be inflexibly pursued. Through many years of controversy with our late associates of the Northern States, we have vainly endeavored to secure tranquillity and obtain respect for the rights to which we were entitled. As a necessity, not a choice, we have resorted to the remedy of separation, and henceforth our energies must be directed to the conduct of our own affairs, and the perpetuity of the Confederacy which we have formed. If a just perception of mutual interest shall permit us peaceably to pursue our separate political career, my most earnest desire will have been fulfilled. But if this be denied to us, and the integrity of our territory and jurisdiction be assailed, it will but remain for us with firm resolve to appeal to arms and invoke the blessing of Providence on a just cause....

We have changed the constituent parts, but not the system of government. The Constitution framed by our fathers is that of these Confederate States. In their exposition of it, and in the judicial construction it has received, we have a light which reveals its true meaning.

Thus instructed as to the true meaning and just interpretation of that instrument, and ever remembering that all offices are but trusts held for the people, and that powers delegated are to be strictly construed, I will hope by due diligence in the performance of my duties, though I may disappoint your expectations, yet to retain, when retiring, something of the good will and confidence which welcome my entrance into office.

It is joyous in the midst of perilous times to look around upon a people united in heart, where one purpose of high resolve animates and actuates the whole; where the sacrifices to be made are not weighed in the balance against honor and right and liberty and equality. Obstacles may retard, but they cannot long prevent, the progress of a movement sanctified by its justice and sustained by a virtuous people. Reverently let us invoke the God of our fathers to guide and protect us in our efforts to perpetuate the principles which by his blessing they were able to vindicate, establish, and transmit to their posterity. With the continuance of his favor ever gratefully acknowledged, we may hopefully look forward to success, to peace, and to prosperity.

Source: Inaugural Address of the President of the Provisional Government, February 18, 1861, by Jefferson Davis. Reprinted in Messages and Papers of the
THINK THROUGH HISTORY: ANSWER
Some may feel that this speech reveals how Jefferson Davis sought to justify the existence of the Confederate States of America by drawing on values expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. For example, Davis justifies secession by noting that the Declaration calls on people to “alter or abolish” governments that do not truly represent them. Grievances mentioned by Davis include the North’s “perverting” the Constitution to serve its own interests. This speech demonstrates that one primary goal of the Confederate States of America was to undertake economic policies that benefited an agricultural economy.