

Charles Sumner is credited with being the first to use the phrase “equality before the law.” Why is that significant to note? How does he infuse equality into the Fourteenth Amendment?

What was Sumner’s relationships with other abolitionists? What about his relationship to women’s abolitionists? How did Sumner feel about women’s rights? Was equality just for native born men or did it also include native born women? What about foreign-born men and women?

How would you have reacted after learning of Sumner’s assault on the floor of the Senate if you were a resident of Massachusetts? How would you have reacted if you were a supporter of Preston Brooks residing in the South?

How would Charles Sumner describe himself? Did he fashion himself a bold political reformer or more a man of conviction? What events led you to choose a description?

How would you describe the relationships Charles Sumner had with his peers, constituents, friends, and spouse? Did they influence his abolitionist ideas and political ambitions? Did his dour demeanor work for or against him?

Were you surprised to learn of Sumner’s friendship with President Lincoln? Did their differing personalities enhance or diminish their ability to work together? How did their friendship affect strategic policy making?

After Lincoln’s assassination, what was Sumner’s influence on the process of Reconstruction? How did he promote an end to government discrimination? What would he think about the approach the modern US government takes to equal rights legislation?

In current discussions about civil rights leaders, how prominently should Charles Sumner’s name be mentioned? How did he make his message of equal rights heard?

Were you surprised that the Founding Fathers’ views on slavery had a substantial influence on Sumner? How did the documents that they created, most notably the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, significantly impact Sumner’s tactics as he fought against slavery and in favor of equal rights?

Have you read other books by Stephen Puleo? If so, how does ***The Great Abolitionist*** compare in terms of writing quality and storytelling? Do you agree with Puleo’s description of this narrative as a “biographical history”? If this is your first Puleo book, would you be inclined to read another?