

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Speech to the 166th Ohio Regiment

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

On August 22, 1864, Lincoln delivered this address to the war-weary soldiers of the 166th Ohio Regiment. With the presidential election fast approaching, Lincoln saw the need to both express his gratitude to the soldiers for their personal sacrifice, and to remind them of the purpose and importance of the war. At the time, there was concern in Lincoln's camp that the soldiers would vote against him in the election, as the Democratic candidate, General George McClellan (1826–85), had pledged to end the war and send soldiers home to their families for good. The day after seeing the regiment, Lincoln wrote his "blind memorandum" stipulating that it is "exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected."

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What does Lincoln say to the soldiers to impress upon them "the importance of success in this contest?" To what sentiments does he appeal? What political principle(s) does he enunciate in sentences 4 to 9? How would the statement of these principles be likely to affect his audience? What does Lincoln's rhetorical style suggest about how leaders should communicate with their subordinates? Would you be persuaded by this speech? Why or why not?

I suppose you are going home to see your families and friends. For the service you have done in this great struggle in which we are engaged I present you sincere thanks for myself and the country. I almost always feel inclined, when I happen to say anything to soldiers, to impress upon them in a few brief remarks the importance of success in this contest. It is not merely for to-day, but for all time to come that we should perpetuate for our children's children this great and free government, which we have enjoyed all our lives. I beg you to remember this, not merely for my sake, but for yours. I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and fair chance for your industry, enterprise, and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. It is for this the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright—not only for one, but for two or three years. The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel.