

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Farewell Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

On November 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected the 16th president of the United States. He was the first president from the Republican Party. Upon embarking on his inaugural journey from Springfield, Illinois, to Washington, DC, Lincoln paid tribute to his friends with a short impromptu speech on February 11, 1861. Now known as the “Farewell Address,” these remarks were given as Lincoln boarded a special presidential train at the Great Western Railroad station. Reporters present at the time printed different variations of Lincoln’s words; below is Lincoln’s own account of his address.

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Like the Gettysburg Address, this eloquent speech has a clear structure: the past (sentences 2-4), the present (sentence 5), and the future (sentences 6-9). Note, too, how he organizes his sentences with parallel structures (e.g., “Here my children have been born, and one is buried.”) What tone or mood does Lincoln achieve through the use of these literary devices? What is Lincoln’s mood as he takes leave of his hometown to assume the presidency? What does he foresee for the future? How is his task “greater than that which rested upon Washington?” Does the mood or tone of this speech surprise you? Why or why not?

My friends:

No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.