

# The Patriotism of Abraham Lincoln

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President-elect Lincoln made very few public remarks before departing Springfield, Ill., for Washington for his inauguration in 1861. On Nov. 20, 1860, however, Lincoln addressed some very brief comments to supporters in Springfield. He urged them "neither express, nor cherish, any harsh feeling towards any citizen who, by his vote, has differed with us. Let us at all times remember that all American citizens are brothers of a common country, and should dwell together in the bonds of fraternal feeling."

Lincoln's concern was catholic. More than a year later in his First Annual Message to Congress in December 1861, President Lincoln noted that America's population had grown eight-fold since its founding: "The increase of those other things which men deem desirable has been even greater."

In the midst of the Civil War, he foresaw a great future for America: "The struggle of today, is not altogether for today -- it is for a vast future also. With a reliance on Providence, all the more firm and earnest, let us proceed in the great task which events have devolved upon us."

Lincoln's was an optimistic patriotism. In that official message of 1861 he predicted that some Americans would live to see the country's population reach 250 million -- a record not reached until the 1990 census.

Lincoln was ever-conscious of the country's potential. In December 1862, Lincoln concluded his second annual message with a stirring admonition of the nature of the American Republic: "Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. ... The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it."

Lincoln understood America's duty and power in the world: "We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just -- a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless."

Another year of civil war passed. Lincoln understood that America's destiny would not be fulfilled without struggle and persistence. In December 1863, he responded to an invitation to give a speech in New York City at Cooper Union. The president, recovering from a mild case of smallpox, declined to come. Instead, he wrote: "Honor to the soldier, and sailor everywhere, who bravely bears his country's cause. Honor also to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field, and serves, as he best can, the same cause -- honor to him, only less than to him, who braves, for the common good, the storms of heaven and the storms of battle."

Lincoln understood his obligation to minister to America's citizens and especially to America's soldiers. In brief remarks to the Ohio regiment in August 1864, Lincoln said: "We have, as all will agree, a free Government, where every man has a right to be equal with every other man. In this great struggle, this form of Government and every form of human right is endangered if our

enemies succeed. There is involved in this struggle the question whether your children and my children shall enjoy the privilege we have enjoyed."

Later that month, Lincoln addressed another Buckeye regiment: "I admonish you not to be turned from your stern purpose of defending your beloved country and its free institutions by any arguments urged by ambitious and designing men, but stand fast to the Union and the old flag."

The president knew that America's future depended on its willingness to defend the union and the freedom it represented. In response to a serenade after his reelection in November 1864, the commander-in-chief said: "Gold is good in its place; but living, brave, patriotic men are better than gold."

President Lincoln's patriotism appealed to all and included all. He concluded his second Inaugural Address in March 1865: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan -- to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

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