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The pillars of the temple of liberty

by [Diana Schaub](#)

The eighth in a series titled “The survival of culture.”

At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

—Abraham Lincoln, Address before the Springfield Young Men’s Lyceum, 1838

Are we to think that September 11 proved Lincoln wrong? Certainly, there are many Americans who now feel vulnerable. In losing their sense of security, they may also have lost their sense of American exceptionalism. While it might have been true that America was once geographically blessed, our moated fortress is no longer unbreachable. ...

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