ADDRESS OF HONORABLE EVERETT MCKINLEY DIRKSEN
UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS
AT THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS CEREMONIES, CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS
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In mid-October, one hundred years ago -- after the debates at Ottawa and Freeport, at Jonesboro and Galesburg, at Charleston and Quincy -- the great debaters stood before a substantial crowd at Alton, Illinois. The contagion of these debates had already set in. The issue had been developed. The immoral character of slavery had been set forth. From a matter of policy or as an intellectual exercise, slavery had become a burning issue.

A phrase kept coming to Lincoln's lips. Slavery is wrong. He continued to emphasize it was wrong and as he concluded his discussion at Alton he said, "That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles -- right and wrong -- throughout the world."

How truly Abraham Lincoln prophesied. Those tongues were stilled -- one by fever and the other by an assassin's bullet. History continued to unfold. The amendments which
had been written into the Constitution as the aftermath of conflict were flouted or received only lip service. There were rouses, stratagems and court decisions to prevent equal protection of the law and to make equality a word rather than a condition.

Today as we stand at a pinnacle of time, one hundred years later, how intriguing it is to survey the present scene. In that long period the Negro has embraced educational opportunities. He has become aware of the power of organization. The skillful and competent lawyers of his own race have gone before the high court of the land — the same institution which handed down the Dred Scott decision so long ago — to plead for equal protection of the law under the very amendments which came out of the dedicated efforts of Abraham Lincoln.

In due time the high tribunal spoke. Only integration meets the rights vouchedsafe in the Constitution. On the heels of the decision came resistance, troops, federal marshals and more court action. The high court was compelled to speak again and it did. It said simply. There must be no delay. It said do it now.

A century has elapsed since the words tumbled from Lincoln’s lips here in Illinois. Enslavement is wrong. Equality cannot be denied. Principle is involved. It is the eternal struggle between what is right and what is wrong.
How interesting, therefore, as we meet here in Charleston, the scene of one of the debates, that the principle enunciated by Abraham Lincoln goes marching on and on and ultimately will not be denied.

What lies ahead? The air is today filled with speculation as to the future course of the federal and the state authorities. Certainly problems will continue. New devices will be developed to resist or to circumvent. Emotions will again arise like threatening storm clouds. But one cannot evaluate the forces operative — not only in this Republic, but in the whole wide-world today — without concluding that color is marching. It is not a peculiar American phenomena. It is world-wide. People of color clamoring for equality. They are human beings. They are possessed of souls. They will not be denied and so one hundred years after Lincoln and Douglas stood here to make the issue, it still rolls on. A Principle Christ is not dead. It is only temporarily stayed and will rise again to march on to fruition.