The veneer of materialism with which we are charged in this
generation may not be so deep and impenetrable after all for in this
season of the year young and old, rich and poor, find time and in-
clination to worship at the shrine of an exalted common man named
Abraham Lincoln.

Our sense of values may not be so distorted as some austere
intellectuals would have us believe for in going back to make green
again the memory of Lincoln we unconsciously pay tribute to the great
truth that social, political and economic progress is but a consequence
of the unfoldment and evolution of the individual.

Our worship is further testimony to the truth that the only
indestructible thing in the universe is the soul of man and the only
reliable force for survival and progress is the human mind.

It is then small wonder that we march back year after year
to commune with the spirit of a humble, kindly common man who not only
had all the answers but who had the courage and unselfishness to utter
them.

II. TESTIMONY TO LINCOLN

This week from ten thousand platforms both here and abroad
testimony will be uttered to the wisdom and patience and greatness of
Lincoln.

In school rooms and lodge halls, in churches and public forums,
in the quiet cloisters of the human heart and in the lighted archways
of remembrance, his name, his character, his words and deeds will be
garlanded by the grateful beneficiaries of our day.

And the sentiments which will be spoken will be as many and
as varied as the diversity of the human mind. There will be touching
memorials reaching from his first muffled birth cry in a Kentucky log
cabin to the final flutter of the spirit as an assassin's bullet sent
it down the glory road.

There will be political addresses to expose how far we have
departed from his faith. There will be evaluations of his social
outlook to demonstrate how we have failed to carry on.
Comparisons will be made and lessons will be drawn from what he said and did to light the way in our time, and so by one fragment and another from this majestic life, he will be made to shine again in the minds and hearts of his countrymen.

III. WHAT TEXT WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

One hundred and forty-six years after his birth, when the world seems a bit mad, we are groping for light and understanding and peace of mind. What a treasury there is from which to choose. The gangling boy pursuing knowledge; the country storekeeper building a reputation for integrity in small things; the young lawyer with his talent for resolving the issues in a law suit; the young congressman assailing a president for timidity and ineptitude; the senatorial candidate matching wits with Stephen Douglas, the little giant, and going to the moral heart of the issue before the nation; the patient president dealing with a land torn by strife; the humble commander-in-chief dealing deftly with an uneasy Congress, a sometimes envious Cabinet, a transient press, Fabian commanders, and with so many people who could not see the principle for the blood; the peerless soul shining through the Second Inaugural Address — all these are here for the choosing.

But my choice would be the 260 words spoken at Gettysburg on a November afternoon in 1863 when the war was still in progress. I choose them because they are dramatic and durable. I choose them because I believe they were inspired. I choose them because they are as fresh and applicable today as when they were spoken, and I choose them because they had a purpose and a design.

IV. LET US REPAIR TO GETTYSBURG

On that day in the mind of Lincoln was the shadow of a beloved son ill at the White House and a wife distraught by the recollection of another son who had passed on only a short while before.

In that great valley hemmed by hills clad in soft blue haze of a November afternoon, he could envision two great armies locked in deadly battle. The thousands of white crosses told him where the bivouac of the immortals could be found. He saw the thousands of visitors scurrying over the valley seeking only for such transient values as buckles, cannon balls and bullets, and immediately before him he saw
the thousands of living who came to hear the measured and musical phrases of one who had been specially engaged for that purpose. But in the mind's eye he could also see the marching generations of the future. And at long last he came with his 268 words.

V. BEHIND THOSE WORDS

Two months before that date a senator had given him a letter from a Boston businessman stating that the President's letter to the senator had been so effective in making clear to the people a correct attitude on the negro question that the President should seize every opportunity to make clear to the plain people what the real issue in the civil conflict really was. But long before that letter Abraham Lincoln had correctly assessed the true issue in his mind and soul. It had been incubating on the prairies of Illinois. Little by little it had shaped itself in his utterances at Alton and Galesburg, at Freeport and Ottawa, at Peoria and Springfield, at Joliet and Quincy. Like the volumes of truth cabin'd in so few words in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and like the truths uttered by the Galilean, the thoughts of Lincoln needed but to be packaged and spoken on the right occasion. And this was the occasion so mysteriously readied by the Divinity which shapes the affairs of men and nations.

The expectant crowd, the music of November breezes, the haunting shadows of fallen heroes, the benediction of the grass which covered the scars and mutilations of earth, the mantle of blue haze that somehow aroused the slumbering truths that lie like treasures deepest in the soul—this was the time appointed by some mystic force for this great utterance.

VI. THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

And so it came. "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense we cannot
dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The
brave men living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far
above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note
nor long remember what we say here but it can never forget what they
did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to
the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly
advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task
remaining before us - that from these honored dead we take increased
devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of
devotion - that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have
died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of
freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the
people shall not perish from the earth."

VII. IN A NUTSHELL

One will search in vain for the pronoun "I". Vainly will
one search for a note of exaltation of the victor. Nothing was forgotten.
All is there--the living, and dead, the past, the present and the future.
It was an entreaty for spiritual dedication to an unfinished task and
to a tradition and a purpose. The tradition was liberty and equality.
The purpose was a rebirth of the spirit of freedom. And hope was there
also--the hope that this great experiment in popular government should
not perish.

VIII. TIME FOR REDEDICATION

It will be 92 years this November that the voice of Lincoln
carried from the hazy hills which surround that majestic valley. The
strife which confronted him has long since ended. The Union was pre-
served. The hurts have been healed. The nation has been welded into
a sisterhood of states. The number of people today is five times
greater than on the day he stood at Gettysburg. Life is gentler
and softer. Our capacity to produce exceeds the dreams of the most
imaginative person in his day. The heart of America has grown with
the passing generations.

It has responded to disaster and distress in every corner
of the earth. It has embraced freedom's cause wherever and whenever
an evil despotism rose up to challenge the God-given right of its
creatures to enjoy this greatest of all treasures.
Since he stood at Gettysburg, his legatees have avenged the butcheries of a Spanish general in Cuba more than half a century ago and brought liberty to a defenseless island people.

Since those imperishable words of his were uttered, his countrymen helped to roll back imperialism in the Old World more than a generation ago.

Since his ringing challenge "whether a nation conceived in liberty can endure", his countrymen thwarted the designs of despots in all parts of the earth even in our time, and today they face up to an even more deadly, determined, destructive force which rides like the horrible horseman of the apocalypse over mankind.

But the beneficiaries of his courage and his wisdom seem confused. Some would appease rather than confront this new challenge. Some would drift rather than exercise mastery. Some would ignore rather than to face up to the implications of this sinister force.

In such a time we need not only a re-dedication of spirit but a re-examination of our direction, our purpose, our destiny and our duty.

IX. WHITHER DO WE GO?

There is a dissident spirit in the land. There are some who believe that the party of Lincoln has departed from the landmarks which the fathers have set.

But let us remember that he once observed that the best part of principle was that "of allowing the people to do as they please with their own business".

But he also said that "the legitimate objective of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all or cannot do so well for themselves in their separate and individual capacity".

This principle was implied by referring to law enforcement, to roads and highways, to schools and charities, to pauperism and orphanages, and to the estates of decedents and to the machinery of government.

Ninety-two years after he stood at Gettysburg we have developed a complicated and highly industrialized civilization. It has produced
a high degree of interdependence. For the expanded enjoyment of living, government today polices transport and communication, whether it be railways or airways, radio and television, pipelines and highways. It monitors old age assistance and social security, health and job security. It curbs monopolies and extends a helping hand to the states. It assists in building hospitals and developing the power of the atom.

Time and progress will produce new problems and invite what seem as new intrusions into the economic life of the nation. Doubtless each intrusion will be met with some scolding and protest. Nor are these protests to be ignored or cast aside because they disturb the emotional unity and harmony of our people in a time of world turmoil and fever.

But the principle asserted by Abraham Lincoln long ago is sound and its application to the complexities of our day will at once help to meet the legitimate responsibilities of government and still preserve the freedom of our people.

X. HOW IMPORTANT IS FREEDOM?

We must better understand the immeasurable importance of freedom to our future.

When the Constitution was completed in the autumn of 1787 our population was less than five persons per square mile. Today it is over fifty. As time goes on it will reach a hundred or more and the character of a growing population is changing. Only thirty years ago the median age was slightly over twenty-five years. Today the median age is well over thirty.

The ratio of aged to the whole population and the ratio of non-producers who retire from active work is growing. The burden on producers will grow and the hope of progress and of survival lies in new processes, new techniques, new products and greater productivity to supply our needs and wants.

This burden will grow as greater demands are made on local, state and national governments for the aged, the unfortunate and those who are the victims of the hazards of an industrial civilization. There is only one real force in all the world that can meet the challenge which lies ahead. It is the fecundity, the ingenuity, the talent and the capacity of the mind of the individual.
But this engine of progress—the human mind—can function and respond only in an atmosphere which is catalyzed by incentive, opportunity, the hope of reward and by freedom.

XI. THE LARGER FREEDOM

Perhaps we have forgotten at times that Lincoln expressed the hope "that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom". It was the nation that was conceived in liberty. It was the nation which was in the balance. The question was whether the nation could endure. That same question recurs in our generation. What is this nation? The easy answer is that it is land, people, and a concept of government. The land will endure. The people will endure. But will the concept endure — this concept of free moral men, gifted by the hand of God to live, to be free, to pursue their own happiness? Will this throbbing concept that history is but the unfoldment of a divine pattern endure?

This is the thing which is under attack in our day. A sinister brutal force is on the move like some disquieting jungle beast stalking its prey. It has been steadily on the move since Nicolai Lenin laid down the pattern of Communist strategy 35 years ago. As he stated it, this Red imperialism would first reduce Eastern Europe to its will. Then it would engulf the masses of Asia. Then it would encircle this nation and wait for the overripe fruit to fall.

How far this thesis of world conquest by Communism has gone can be read in each day's headlines. Eastern Europe is but a satellite to Red Russia today. Korea and Indo-China are under constant pressure. The Republic of China has become the Red people's republic. The propaganda attack on Southeast Asia is a relentless thing. With an imperialistic arrogance which is typical of Communism, Red China now menaces our own defense perimeter in the Pacific and is determined to extinguish the lamps of freedom in the hearts of those Chinese who hold the bastion on Formosa. In a day and age when events move so swiftly, how long will it be before the design of encirclement is complete and our national freedom in dire peril.

This is no academic threat. What is occurring in the Pacific is no transient tussle over an island. It is but part of the overall
design of a relentless foe moving with all the certainty of a glacier to squeeze this nation into a cubicle and then patiently wait until economic desperation forces us into the mold of socialism. And so in our time, we come back to the prophetic question which fell from Lincoln's lips at Gettysburg as to "whether a nation conceived in liberty can long endure".

XII. OUR TASK

The task before us is at once simple and difficult. It is a problem of morals and morale. It is for us to remember that if freedom is lost or impaired, it must be retrieved with pain and agony and blood, for man was meant to be free. It is for us to remember that when the freedom of the nation fails, all personal liberty will fail with it. It is for us to realize that progress and survival demand that we stand firm and summon up the will to defend the very concept which has made America a thing apart. It calls for a sense of mission that is worthy of every generation which has kept this concept of freedom intact. It calls for a sense of individual and group responsibility like that of other days to meet the challenge which is before us. The voice at Gettysburg still rings down the corridor of time.