My friends, I hope you won't be offended if I say you are a little incidental to the program because as I announced it I said this would be a visit with a fellow citizen of ours whose name is Abraham Lincoln. You see I want to talk to him today and visit with him. I want to make it as much first person as I can in the hope that it adds to my inspiration and I hope perhaps to yours.

You see, Mr. Lincoln, you were born a hundred and fifty-one years ago and you lived where we live out on the prairies of Illinois. You hallowed those prairies when you were there and your spirit hallows those prairies today.

I think of you, Mr. Lincoln, as the magnificent missionary. You came at just the right time. I think it was ordained. Frankly I don't know how to explain you in any other way because you were a missionary in a great cause. It was a moral cause. You said so. You said it many times in the Lincoln-Douglas debates, in most of the cities in Illinois where you visited. You said it at the Cooper Union Speech a hundred years ago this month. So you became a great moral missionary.

You were frustrated. People are frustrated now. There were so many things you wanted that you contended for but you never got them and I can well imagine that being a human being you must have been frustrated like people are frustrated today. But destiny had other things in store for you. You were a candidate for the Senate but Stephen Douglas managed to be selected by the Illinois Legislature. That Mr. Lincoln as you recall was before we amended the Constitution so that Senators were selected by direct vote of the people. So Mr. Douglas was selected. I presume that was a little frustrating. Perhaps it hurt a little. I suppose you had your heart set on that Senatorship. But you see destiny had different things in store. Had you become a Senator you
might not have become President of the United States and the Commander-in-Chief of our Forces in a rather distressing hour. But you see that destiny picked you up on the prairies of Illinois and hurled you into the White House. There was a crisis in the country. The Union was in jeopardy and here was the evil shadow of slavery everywhere and you had set yourself against it. So you became the President. You became the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the country. And then the bloodletting began and all the agony and the fever. Of course, you remember so well the cancers of fear and concern and anxiety that were in the hearts of people everywhere in the country. But you remained so steadfast through all of it and at long last the bloodletting stopped. The guns became deathly still and then the larks began to sing again and the evil business of conflict came to an end and the Union was saved. The Union of States was saved because of your purpose, your fortitude and your steadfastness.

And then the bitter bullet of the assassin took you to the ages. You were a gaunt and homely country lawyer and I suppose there were lots of people who never suspected that you would ever be President of the United States, that you would ever be Commander-in-Chief of the forces in a critical hour but you were.

So I explain you Mr. Lincoln -- only that the Almighty ordained you to come when you did.

Now in this day and generation a hundred and fifty-one years after you were born you hear people say, I suppose it has been said millions of times, "Oh if you Mr. Lincoln were only living now. You would be equal to any crisis that comes whether it is at home or abroad." I suppose that is frustration. That is a kind of escape in a generation where the tempo is swift and there are so many problems and so many challenges. I don't suppose Mr. Lincoln that's strange. I encountered some where along the line a statement by a very celebrated Englishman who when Britain was confronted with a crisis began to think of John Milton
the great defender of free speech and in an hour of agony he said, "Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour." And so Mr. Lincoln our people today a hundred and fifty-one years after your birth say, "Lincoln you should be living in this hour." But you do live. You see that is the interesting thing about it. The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Hebrews and in it he was speaking about the sacrifices made by Cain by Able to gather and gain righteousness and then Paul says, "Being dead yet speaketh." So you see Mr. Lincoln being dead yet you speak. And you have been speaking all the time ever since you were here. That's true of all great men. That must be true of Washington whom you so greatly revered. He was the guiding spirit of the Republic in an hour when we had no precedents, no rules and were trying to make permanent a new concept in a whole field of government. But Washington lives.

A Madison lives for whom you had high regard. After the Constitution was formulated it still had to be sold to people and so by pen and by tongue he made speeches and wrote articles for newspapers to sell that Constitution to the people and he and others succeeded. So Madison lives.

Franklin lives for whom you had high regard. Eighty-three years old when he was in the Constitutional Convention - ripe old age - but in him was that gentle spirit that brought these opposing forces together. And so Franklin lives.

And Jefferson lives, of course. Jefferson who was always thinking about safeguarding the rights and liberties of his fellow men.

And so in the same spirit you live as Paul said being dead yet speaketh and so you have been gone physically a long time but you still speak to your countrymen and I think in that whole procession of great men you are by all odds the greatest. I think H. G. Wells placed you among five of the greatest ever produced in the whole history of mankind. I agree with him. And so being gone you still speak and there are many things that you say to
your fellow countrymen as these problems arise. One of them for instance, Mr. Lincoln, when government undertakes new functions and new objects people will sometimes say Federal Government has no business in that field. Then we wonder about you. What did you say about it. Well you said something that is being quoted constantly right now. You said the legitimate object of government was to do for a community of people what needs to be done and what they cannot do so well for themselves or at all in their separate and individual capacities. It is a wonderful statement and Mr. Lincoln it is just as good and just as vital and just as fresh today as it was when you uttered it a long time ago. The legitimate function of government, when government goes into many fields, and it becomes something of a problem to keep it on the beam that the central government does not get too strong and that it does not endanger the liberties of the people or the rights of the states in our federal-state system.

But you said it all in the statement about the legitimate object of government. But one thing people forget when they quote you. They forget to say what you said, what needs to be done. And the other thing is it could be done at the local level or at the state level rather than at the federal level. So you see with these problems that are before us how fresh you are and how eloquently you speak even today.

Then you speak of freedom. I think in my researches of what you said and what you did the word freedom and the word liberty and the word independence recur more frequently perhaps than any other words that I can think of. You expressed it constantly. You appeared at Edwardsville, Illinois, and there you proclaimed the necessity for that spirit of freedom as the very basis of our prosperity, our enterprise, our progress, our growth and our future greatness and how right you were. You see sometimes they just identify you with freedom in its relation to slavery. But you were thinking of the growth of the country, of the prosperity of the country and you said freedom. That was the great moving
force. So you see even now when these questions of government intrusion into the economic life of the people arise we can go back to you and you are just as fresh, Mr. Lincoln, you are just as vital and you are just as current as you were when you uttered it. You see that is a testimony to the fact that you were basic and fundamental.

Then perhaps time will permit me to say a word about your purpose. You wrote your old friend, Joshua Giddings, a letter and you said if I fail it will be because of my lack of ability and not because of lack of purpose. You wrote Mr. Henry Asbury a letter somewhat to the same affect and you said you would be steadfast in purpose and you were and because you were today we have one country not two. The evil shadow and the evil specter of human bondage and human slavery is not upon it. You know, Mr. Lincoln, like others I have often wondered what our destiny would have been if you had failed in your purpose, if you hadn't looked down the vista of years and said this is so vast it's not for today or tomorrow but it's for the future. And so as that question arises Oh if Lincoln were back. Well, you are back. You have never been gone. You see you are still with us. The interesting thing is we haven't put you on a pedestal. I can't imagine you on a pedestal, Mr. Lincoln, because we have kept you close. We can put admirals and generals and statesmen on pedestals. They seem so cold. They seem so remote. They seem so reserved from us. But you see the reason for your greatness is yourself and because we kept you close instead of enshrining you in cold marble we have enshrined you in every human heart since you have been gone. So Mr. Lincoln I say to you as Paul said to the Hebrews, being dead yet speaketh. And so we can do no better than to live with you from time to time with the problems that are before us and if we have the purpose and the devotion to basic and fundamental things the answers will be found and freedom will be preserved.

Mr. Lincoln, we owe you a great debt of gratitude.