If there were ever an occasion and a place where a listed speaker should be
tempted to stand mute, this would most certainly qualify. What was said here
nearly a century ago in consecrating this hallowed ground seems destined to
endure beyond man's memory of the deeds that were done here. And yet, despite
our admitted incompetence to vie with Lincoln's felicitous phrase or to match his
somber eloquence, it is good that we return to Gettysburg--to the turning point
of national history, to the place where national unity was saved, where the ideals
expressed by the Emancipator became possible of realization.

For Lincoln, the task was that of dedicating a resting place for the honored
dead of his generation. For us, that period and its events--even its signifi-
cance--must seem remote, almost contrived in the relative simplicity of the
issues behind the awful struggle that took place here. We look at Gettysburg--and
at Lincoln's expression of its meaning--with the perspective of a century. Having
lived through a generation of depression, war and a peace that gives no peace, we
tend to regard the events of early July 1863 as a piece of the past that is
walled off from present reality.

And yet, to reread Lincoln's message at Gettysburg is to be reinforced in
our recollection of what was at stake on this field of honor and of sorrow. We
see the issues of 1863 stripped of the partisan distractions and the heroic folk-
lore constructed through the years. Lincoln compressed a decade of strife and
two years of war into one declaration of faith: That the Nation dedicated to the
proposition that all men are created equal should not perish from the earth.

That nation has not perished from the earth--but neither have its ideals,
so eloquently expressed, been fully implemented. That task remains for our
generation to fulfill. For a hundred years, the equality defined on this field
has been withheld from millions of our fellow citizens. What they once patiently
awaited, they now demand as a matter of right. Unrest is at large over the
Nation--and over nothing that was not basically at issue here a century ago.

We search for peaceful solution to the civil rights issues of 1963.
Peaceful solutions have been found in many areas of this subject, principally
through the high principles, the vision and the dedication to constitutional
guarantees enunciated by an enlightened judiciary and by far-ranging executive
action to assure that these guarantees are not denied, through artifice or
legalistic sleight of hand. The President has now called for a new dedication to
the equality under law which Lincoln defined as the purpose behind a bloody struggle a century ago. It is time for the Congress to respond—to give positive expression to the ideals for which men fought in the past. National honor, not the threat of civil strife, must be the motivating force by which all our citizens are accorded, ungrudgingly, the equal opportunity for which our system stands.

Thus Gettysburg is more than a historical reminder, important as that is. It is just as important that Abraham Lincoln gave voice to what must be a national objective for our generation. It is therefore fitting that we should meet here to mark the further perfection of this shrine to man's highest ideals as well as heroic deeds.

I am honored by the privilege of accepting the public-spirited donation of key tracts of land which will help round out this National Historical Park. I commend the two organizations which are responsible for making this event possible. They represent the finest aspects of the spirit that motivates preservation of our national heritage. The Military Order of the Loyal Legion has an illustrious history of patriotic devotion derived from the forebears of its membership, Union officers who served with distinction on these fields. The roots of the Gettysburg Battlefield Preservation Association also reach deep into the soil of this valley and the study of its history. In the finest traditions of the conservation movement, its members have excited the concern of Americans everywhere to protect these battlefields for public use and inspiration.

To these organizations, therefore, and to the many private donors of large and small amounts, I extend the sincere thanks of the American public. On behalf of President Kennedy and Secretary Udall, I accept these lands and pledge to the donors that they will be conserved and dedicated solely to the purposes for which they have been tendered.

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