

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, SPOKESMAN FOR AMERICA
Remarks by Ralph G. Newman
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We pay tribute tonight, not to a man who lived a century ago and whose life span was 56 years, 2 months, and 3 days, but to an individual who lives today in the 154th year of his humble birth in Kentucky. We Americans rightfully continually honor Abraham Lincoln as the man who has affected most profoundly the likes, thoughts, attitudes, and actions of modern Americans. Why does he continue to grow in our political philosophy, our cultural inheritance, our social and moral consciousness? Why has he remained, in the near century since April, 1865, as powerful an influence and reality as he was in life? Why is it that that influence is growing, not fading.

Lincoln conceived of America as more than people, or homes, or wealth, or wheat, or corn, or steel, or factories. To him it embodied an idea. Common sacrifices for a new and better way of life were like "mystic chords of memory," he said, "stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land. . ." America was a trustee for humanity. The United States was bound together by an idea. If

the Union perished the idea would perish with it. Thus the issue of the Civil War to Lincoln was the preservation of the American Union, in order that America might go on to fulfill its mission as the exemplar of democracy to the world.

Abraham Lincoln, who rescued a whole race of men from slavery and saved the American experiment in Democracy for all time, has become in the near century since his death a kind of symbol of all the Good toward which humanity is striving; a living proof that Man can attain that Good. Revered to the point of worship, both in this country and abroad, his name has come to mean many things; as if the very name itself spells out the truest meanings of honesty, compassion, humor, and wisdom. Yet, he lives on for people as a man . . . a flesh and blood and bone human being whose greatness they can accept because they can accept his origin, his ways, his laughter. He is like a neighbor with whom to swap yarns over the back fence at sunset; he is easy-walking, easy-talking. You don't have to play up to him and he won't play down to you. You know where you are with Lincoln.

And yet, there is that dedication in him, that urge of destiny running through him and the strength to answer the challenge, and you wonder . . . Is some of this same greatness in my neighbor, my son, myself? There may well be, for Lincoln was one of us. Lincoln was all of us. He was spokesman for all that went before him in the building of America and everything for which we have since fought to preserve.

There are enduring lessons in Lincoln's philosophy. The nations of the earth will always need his faith in the people, in their judgment, in their ability to govern themselves. And America has, to the farthest generation, the obligation to maintain and fulfill the destiny prepared by the founding fathers for what Lincoln termed in affection and respect the "family of man."