as countrymen again. Sure, from the perspective of African Americans and as an African American, I have a lot of misgivings about how national reconciliation during that period was handled. If the northerners fought the war to save the union, they never had to acknowledge the moral underpinning of the cause of the war—slavery. So it’s not about freeing African Americans. And many northerners fought the war to save the union, not to free the slaves. Southerners, many of them argue they were fighting to begin to end the institution of slavery, they were protecting their way of life down here, that big government doesn’t have a right to come down here and tell us what to do, a very different principle. And so at the end of the war, the northerners can forgive the southerners because, well, we’ve settled it on a battlefield. Except the central issue for which the war is fought, the issue of slavery from a northern perspective and the issue of slavery from the southern perspective, the problem the war was being fought over are never brought into the reconciliation: When are we going to get the right to vote? When are we going to get housing? When are we going to get equality? When are we going to help the nation live up to the true meaning of its creed? And that process would begin immediately after the Civil War during reconstruction—I wish the House of Representatives would let me line up the rest of my colleagues to fight for what is right, to participate to fight for what is right, to advance the idea that all men are created equal, to those martyrs, to those champions of equality and equal rights. But all of us are adhering to old dogma about what the States can do and about what the Federal Government isn’t supposed to do? The American people at this hour are asking of us to do something for them. But the fact that President Obama is saying that our problems today are small by comparison to the problems that Abraham Lincoln faced is a statement about the magnitude of the problems that Abraham Lincoln, our 16th President, confronted.

And so, Mr. Speaker, even as we come to the floor and I stand here as the 91st African American to ever have the privilege of serving in a Congress where more than 12,000 people have served, I’m just the 91st, I owe my service in the Congress to the unsung heroes, to the men and women, the sheroes and the heroes, who fought to advance the idea that all men are created equal, to Medgar Evers and Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney, two Jews and a black, to Viola Liuzzo, to those martyrs, to those champions of equality and equal rights. But all of us owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the 16th President who allowed our generation to go on to generations to fight for what is right, to have the right to agree to agree and agree to disagree in the context of our magnificent Republic. And so, Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, on the 200th anniversary of the greatest American war ever lived and on behalf of the American people, we say thank you. And we say happy birthday. I yield back the balance of my time.