

August 31, 1963

AN OPEN LETTER TO MY OUT-OF-TOWN RELATIVES AND FRIENDS
WHO COULD NOT ATTEND THE FREEDOM MARCH, AUGUST 28, 1963

It was all the happiest Christmases of childhood telescoped into one when this most beautiful of all days ended so peacefully, so triumphantly. It was all the most inspirational of Easters as it resurrected deepest self, family and race pride, and displayed God's broadest smile in 100 years. To me it was even more wonderful than the Easter morning I awoke to the words "It's a boy!". It was all fourth of July, for it came closest to Independence Day in the hearts of all Negroes. It transcended all one's birthdays, the wedding day, the anniversaries, for the individual was so incidental and secondary.

The scene at the Wash. Monument grounds that morning was a Utopia of complete togetherness, as the thousands gathered. Come what may, I could no more resist being there than I can now resist the compulsion to share this experience with you. Having requested leave from my job, I had volunteered to work for the Urban League that day selling brochures. Surprise overwhelmed us when accidentally my friend, Ruth Bostic, who accompanied me, and I were stationed as hostesses in the National Headquarters tent where the other helpers were members of the New York NAACP March Committee. Our position behind the long tables which encircled the tent's open sides gave us one of the best views; therefore, as I "worked", I observed the most awesome and spectacular panorama of my experience. Before my sometimes tear-brimmed eyes, the formation of the March took place. Most unforgettable was the delegation from Jackson, Miss., who approached our tent behind their street-wide banner and sang, "Freedom Now". A few yards behind me in the tent, some of the leaders and VIP'S assembled. I had brought a transistor radio instead of a camera. Alas! There were Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Bunch, Dr. Benjamin Mays, Revs. Franklin Jackson and Walter Fauntroy, to whom I chatted. Bernard Ruskin was everywhere. Ruby Dee was "chic"; Lena Horne, thin-faced in a yellow scarf, kept lifting her sunglasses. When a relative of his asked me to help her find Charles Evers, I mistook James Baldwin for him. Beautiful baby orchid leis, flown in as gifts from Hawaii, were hung around us. Even I received one, which I'll keep forever.

When the program started at the Lincoln Memorial, I did not go but took a young white NAACP fellow's job next to me so he could march. As the afternoon passed, I accepted hundreds of signatures on the Pledge Cards; I'm proudest of my own. With my transistor to my ear, I enjoyed the speeches. Ruth and I got a bus home a little ahead of the main crowd. Thus was spent a day so dramatic and heartwarming that its details are etched in my memory forever.

Just to have been one small grain of pepper in that vast shaker of salt and pepper together! Since then, all 210,000 grains of us have been shaken out over the country to season America's taste in every more democratic way possible. In some parts of the Melting Pot, America, the taste may be more bitter but in many more the taste will be more palatable. Through this great event, the potentials of the NEGRO are more beautifully transfixed on the face of the world. We must march on, pray on, work on until Equality whets the appetite of every human being.

Phyllis Gibbs Fauntroy