I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. And so, with a final shout of "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

In the long shot, we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that our nation has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this note, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But now is the time to mechanisms of the ballot box, to register voters, to utilize the power of the ballot. And we will be free one day.

As we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always remain true to our unique heritage. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting demands for equal rights of our nation; and when we use the weapons of civil resistance the white people of this nation now look upon us as though we were pariahs, as though we were no better than so many other Negroes. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro is an exile in his own land. And so we must be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote, and a Negro in New York be disfranchised simply because his skin is dark.

One hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of segregation in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still not free. Now is the time to make this nation a great nation. Now is the time to make justice real.

And one hundred years later, the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, a state converted to a Jim Crow tròphy for white people, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. And at the right time, we will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. And so, with a final shout of "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"