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The March

It was surely the largest demonstration in the history of Washington. At mid-day on Saturday you could see the long line of marchers, mostly young, some old, strung out all the way to the Capitol. To the south, the grounds of the Washington Monument were carpeted with people. Volunteer marshals kept the march in file, and every few moments the air was charged with *peace now, peace now*. Then, at intervals, there were small bands of those who seemed interested in war, or in hate; *Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh* they chanted, and *One Two Three Four, Blank The Pigs, Blank The War*. Those were the ones who marched under the flags of the National Liberation Front.

"A man does what he must," John F. Kennedy once wrote, "in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality." So these men and women and children who marched this weekend are doing what they feel they must, to protest the war and the system they feel brought it about. To understand it is to discriminate between the crazies who emptied in Dupont Circle and the majority of the marchers at the Washington Monument. It is to understand that the young of this country are the ones who bear the brunt of this war, the men in the rice fields of Vietnam as well as their wives in Bangor or San Diego; and it is one thing to be concerned about the spread of communism while watching a television set in Hyattsville and quite another to contemplate the draft from the University of Maryland. It would make everyone more comfortable if the youngsters, "the kids," spoke from experience, either as veterans of the Vietnam war or from some other knowledgeable stance. But they don't see it that way. The only knowledge you need, is the knowledge that you are alive and in the absence of a clear and present danger intend to stay that way. The overriding principle is life over death, a moral position so stark and unforgiving that it very quickly absorbs the quiet and the thoughtful, those who believe that nothing in life is ever simple, nor death either. The thug with the red flag dominates the co-ed with the blue button. *What is beautiful is moral, and that is all there is to it.*

Of course that isn't all there is to it, any more than *peace now* is "all there is" to the solution of the Vietnam war. But to dig beneath the rhetoric is to discover something extraordinary, and quite beautiful. Those who were here yesterday are here in support of what is best about this country. Forget Weatherman and the revolutionaries for a moment, and consider what these marchers are doing, and have done since 1960 and the first sit-ins and freedom rides. What began with a seat in the front of the bus for a black woman in Montgomery, Alabama, is going to end with the halt of a war. Or not "end" because the protest will go on, against water pollution or foul air or ticky-tacky automobiles or dangerous drugs or whatever. It will go on because people have seen what the society has become and do not like it. If the solutions of many of those here today are not especially appealing, it is up to the "ruling classes"—as Weatherman would have it—to come up with something better. To state the problem is to recall Dylan's song of a few years back, *Something is happening here, and you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?*

Any collection of several hundred thousand people is bound to be a mixed bag, and so it is with the march. It is by its nature incendiary, and that it went off so well is a tribute to the organizers and the professionalism and elan of the Washington police; but the keynote was the non-violent atmosphere, and the thanks for that goes to the kids. This march was a manifestation part revolution, part protest, part religious experience, part commune, and—judging from the social schedule in northwest Saturday night—part college weekend. It is also by turns decent, intolerant, thoughtful, tolerant, rambunctious, silly, deeply serious, sad, frightening—mostly good, partly not so good.

"What do you think? Don't you think they will say of this march ten years from now that it was a nice thing?" asked one youngster on his way to Arlington Cemetery the other night.

The answer was, Yes, It's a nice thing.