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EXECUTIVE

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7/26-11-1/Finch, Robert

August 2, 1971

Dear Mr. President:

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

No doubt others already have told you how magnificently Bob Finch handled the situation as your standin during the Tubman funeral activities in Liberia.

My reaction is unique, however, because I had been there before with an American notable. And although the purpose of the Nixon visit in 1957 was quite different from that of the Finch trip in 1971, on the whole there seemed to be a remarkable degree of sameness of personalities, ceremonial pomp and practice, and so forth. Therefore I could not help but view the Finch visit in terms of yours.

Since returning from Monrovia Friday night bits and pieces of the Liberia experience have been cropping up in my mind. And on putting them together and viewing the whole, I felt I should write this letter, Mr. President: that if somehow you had been able to see for yourself the manner in which he represented you on what was actually an extraordinarily delicate mission, you would have been proud as hell of Bob Finch!

While President Tubman's death and funeral went virtually unnoticed by the American press (and was treated comic opera stuff by Time and News-week), to Africa, and especially Black Africa, it was more important than the deaths of Churchill and DeGaulle were to Europe. Frankly, when we left for Monrovia last Tuesday night, I suspected that the whole thing, including top hats and frock coats for the burial service, would be merely a hot but interesting two-day excursion. Believe me, Sir, I learned differently the moment we landed and were formed up for a motorcade through Monrovia, Bob's first chore as our Presidential representative. From then until Friday morning, I doubt that Finch managed to squeeze in altogether five or six hours of sleep. Just the funeral functions (which included a "viewing" that went on for five solemn hours and a "wake" which was still going strong when I sneaked away at 2 a.m.) exhausted me and everybody else in our crowd. But while the rest of us collapsed, Finch kept moving;-- no kidding! Practically every Black Chief of State was there, from Jawara of Gambia to Sallasie of Ethiopia, and I believe Bob managed through those two and a half days and nights to talk with every one of them and their most significant aides. The local press and radio had hailed Finch, on arrival, as "President Nixon's closest friend"; and you can imagine how that contributed to the delicacy of Bob's visitations. Among other things, the town was rife with rumors that the tribal people who had adored Tubman, would not accept Tolbert, and Liberia could become another Congo or whatever. As you, of course, know, Finch