

Letters

Various Authors

1965

NOTE: The following Letter to the Editor of the *Detroit News* was written by Alvin Harrison, NSM [Northern Student Movement] field secretary in Detroit, in response to a number of letters published regarding his participation in a Teach-in on Viet Nam at Wayne University. Mr. Harrison was quoted as saying "That's your flag, baby, not mine."

To the Editor,

Which flag is the flag of Alvin Harrison? I have no idea. I do not reject your flag; rather the country for which it stands has rejected me.

And when someday I too can claim the flag is mine it will be because I and others who struggle with me daily have made it mine despite you. For the present, I think I have no flag.

No reasonable black man (or white man either) can suggest that the American flag or the American experience means the same to those of us who are black as to those who are white. It is a flag which was created by a country whose constitution defined a black male as being three-fifths of a man. As far as I am concerned, we are still allowed to be three-fifths of a man.

We have fought in every war this country has ever had, including the Revolutionary War. For what? We return to find that we are still ghettoized, segregated and unemployable.

We compete for housing with rats and roaches and are told we don't know how to live; we're sent to inferior schools and told we are uneducated and unqualified; beaten by police and discriminated against by the courts, denied representation in government and then told we have no respect for law and order. And finally we are murdered and nothing is done.

And yet we go to Santo Domingo with 20,000 troops when the lives and property of white Americans is threatened. Or we go to Watts with the same number of troops for the same reason. And we are told that the American flag gives us the same protection it does any other citizen. It does not.

What was the flag of James Chaney, of four girls murdered in a Birmingham church, of Medgar Evers, Jimmie Lee Jackson, Cynthia Scott, Nathaniel Williams, John Christian...? Suppose you tell me which flag is my flag.

Yours for freedom,

Alvin Harrison

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