

Has the Flag Divided Us?

New York — (RNS) — As never before, the use and meaning of the American flag are matters for debate and controversy.

The war in Southeast Asia, student demonstrations, counter-protests, attitudes toward dissent and interpretations of national loyalty are among polarizing issues.

The stars and stripes have come to be identified with what the peace movement considers the pro-Vietnam war forces, what some anti-war advocates have called "bland loyalties that falsify the present."

But there are signs that the peace movement, at least a part of it, wants to claim the flag for its cause and as a symbol of an "America, that by God's grace, is yet to be."

Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam, an interreligious peace organization, has called on activist peace-seekers to "recapture the flag." Members have prepared a "rite of dedication." Prayers in the service ask divine power for strides towards a "new humanity," for a nation of "righteousness and peace" and for security not based on the "habits of the past."

"We recall by this flag the history to which you have guided us, Oh Lord," the dedication service states. "We recall the burden, through blood and travail, of a new nation on a new continent. We recall the invitation of the wilderness, the high hope of a new beginning for all mankind."

The current wave of claims for the flag as standard of those who, if not supporting the war, at least oppose the activist anti-war movement, got its big push last Fall. Reacting to the massive plans for the October Moratorium, veterans' groups began passing out lapel-pin flags. The emblems were to identify those opposing the

Court Okays 'Peace' Flags

New York — (NC)—A three-judge federal court ruled here that officials of Long Island's Nassau County could not prosecute anti-war activists wearing buttons that show a peace symbol superimposed on the American flag.

In a 2-1 decision, the court ruled that a 1905 New York law protected the flag itself from abuse. But it added that the law would be too broadly interpreted if it was applied to representations of the flag.

"Our citizens," the court ruled, "are entitled not to be threatened with prosecution because of a particular interpretation given to a somewhat vague statute by a prosecutor whose views on public issues may differ from others. The wielding of such individual power approaches too closely that exercised in the so-called totalitarian countries."

Moratorium. Flag decals for automobiles also became popular.

The usage escalated during the November mass marches in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco. From the point of view of the "Old Glory" champions, matters were not helped by Yippies and SDS Weathermen waving the red flag of liberation, the black flag of anarchy and Vietcong banners in the nation's capital. There also were American flags waving above the huge peace throngs at the Washington monument.

In terms of history, it is probably true that any rededication of the flag to the current peace cause is an uphill trudge. National flags, in almost all cases, originated as military standards. The Continental Congress

of what was to become the U.S. authorized the first version of the stars and stripes in 1777, during the Revolutionary War. The military origin and usage are clearly reflected in the national anthem.

The only mention of peace in the "Star-Spangled Banner" is the unfamiliar third stanza. And that is followed by a line saying, "Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just."

A different polarization exists in the South. An anti-war clergyman with a flag decal on his auto window was asked why he was displaying the "sign of the hard hats."

"That's no hard hat sign," he replied. "It's what the black people here put on their cars in contrast to the racists who use the Confederate flag."

Campus Unrest Seen Top Problem

Princeton, N.J. — (NC) — Campus unrest has become the most important problem facing this country today according to a recent Gallup Poll.

Until now, campus unrest had not rated higher than fifth

on the list of problems Americans consider most pressing. The Vietnam war and racial strife had dominated the list. The survey was based on 1,509 interviews May 22-25 across the nation.

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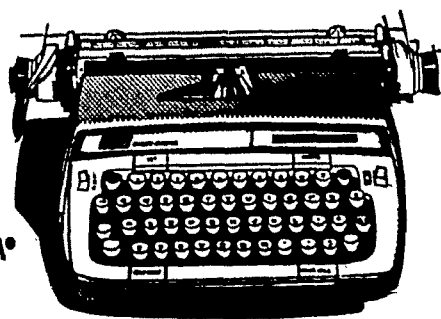
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