

From Herbert W. Vilakazi

25 October 1958  
Hartford, Conn.

*In an 8 November reply to this letter, King thanked Vilakazi for his "very kind comments concerning" Stride Toward Freedom.<sup>1</sup> King added that he hoped the young South African was finding his stay in America meaningful: "It is a delight to find one your age so intensely interested in the problems confronting our world."*

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1. Herbert W. Vilakazi (1943–), born in Nongoma, South Africa, moved to Hartford, Connecticut, in 1957 when his father accepted a seminary teaching post. He received a B.A. (1966) and an M.A. (1968) from Columbia University. Vilakazi taught sociology at Essex County College in Newark, New Jersey (1969–1980) before returning to South Africa to teach at the University of Transkei. In May 1984 Vilakazi and three colleagues were arrested and deported following a student uprising at the university. Since 1989 he has been the chair of the department of sociology at the University of

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Dear Sir,

I am sure you'll be quite amazed to receive this letter from me. I am a fifteen years old boy from South Africa. (15 yr old) I arrived here in America about 8 months ago with my family. My father is a professor in the Hartford Seminary Foundation here in Hartford.<sup>2</sup>

The real reason that caused me to write this letter is to express my joy and good luck for your recently published book. (Stride Toward Freedom.) I just got through reading it and I found it very interesting. I only hope and pray that as many people as possible may have the opportunity of reading it throughout the world. I am quite sure that some of them will get or have a totally new or different attitude, that is in regard to the life and treatment that the Negroes suffer in the South. I am sure all those who read your book (oppressers and perpetrators of Segregation) will be ashamed of themselves. There'll always be a scar in their souls or a mark that would seem quite difficult to ~~re~~ erase. I am quite sure that as soon as they read it they will realize what they are doing before God. In fact I am afraid that when the segregationists are turned to "loving" the very few who are against it will turn the opposite way.

I was born in South Africa and I think the way they treat (us Africans) is worse than in the South. I was lucky enough to escape that treatment but my soul always think of my brothers and sisters who are behind. The Whites treat the Bantu tribes as though they were non-human beings. Some Africans have been accused of high treason but they were found innocent.<sup>3</sup> Some people still do not realize the way they are treated. I hope this (childish) letter doesn't take much of your time, sir, I just wanted to praise your work and please remember my home country, (South Africa.) Many people here do not realize how badly people in South Africa live. There is nobody who spreads the story. I hope that I can grow to be an older person and see you, and the work you have done in Montgomery. However, my father would be very glad to come and tell you more about South Africa and its problems concerning the Africans. Please do not mind my letter, as I said before, I only want to praise your work and hope that all people will have the opportunity of reading it. My father is teaching Anthropology here.

May God bless [~~strikeout illegible~~] your work and your family.

Sincerely Yours  
[*signed*] Herbert Vilakazi  
(Herbert Vilakazi)

ALS. MLKP-MBU: Box 84.

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Zululand. In 1997 South African president Nelson Mandela appointed Vilakazi to serve on the five-member Electoral Commission to oversee national elections in 1999.

2. Vilakazi is the son of anthropologist Absolom L. Vilakazi.

3. In 1956 South African police arrested 156 anti-apartheid-activists and charged them with high treason and conspiracy for plotting to overthrow the government. Following an international protest in December 1957 many of the prisoners were freed; others remained incarcerated until 1961.