

The Pledge of Allegiance

A Short History

by Dr. John W. Baer

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Francis Bellamy (1855 - 1931), a Baptist minister, wrote the original Pledge in August 1892. He was a Christian Socialist. In his Pledge, he is expressing the ideas of his first cousin, Edward Bellamy, author of the American socialist utopian novels, **Looking Backward** (1888) and **Equality** (1897).

Francis Bellamy in his sermons and lectures and Edward Bellamy in his novels and articles described in detail how the middle class could create a planned economy with political, social and economic equality for all. The government would run a peace time economy similar to our present military industrial complex.

The Pledge was published in the September 8th issue of **The Youth's Companion**, the leading family magazine and the **Reader's Digest** of its day. Its owner and editor, Daniel Ford, had hired Francis in 1891 as his assistant when Francis was pressured into leaving his baptist church in Boston because of his socialist sermons. As a member of his congregation, Ford had enjoyed Francis's sermons. Ford later founded the liberal and often controversial Ford Hall Forum, located in downtown Boston.

In 1892 Francis Bellamy was also a chairman of a committee of state superintendents of education in the National Education Association. As its chairman, he prepared the program for the public schools' quadricentennial celebration for Columbus Day in 1892. He structured this public school program around a flag raising ceremony and a flag salute - his 'Pledge of Allegiance.'

His original Pledge read as follows: 'I pledge allegiance to my Flag and (to*) the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.' He considered placing the word, 'equality,' in his Pledge, but knew that the state superintendents of education on his committee were against equality for women and African Americans. [* 'to' added in October, 1892.]

Dr. Mortimer Adler, American philosopher and last living founder of the Great Books program at Saint John's College, has analyzed these ideas in his book, **The Six Great Ideas**. He argues that the three great ideas of the American political tradition are 'equality, liberty and justice for all.' 'Justice' mediates between the often conflicting goals of 'liberty' and 'equality.'

In 1923 and 1924 the National Flag Conference, under the 'leadership of the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution, changed the Pledge's words, 'my Flag,' to 'the Flag of the United States of America.' Bellamy disliked this change, but his protest was ignored.

In 1954, Congress after a campaign by the Knights of Columbus, added the words, 'under God,' to the Pledge. The Pledge was now both a patriotic oath and a public prayer.

Bellamy's granddaughter said he also would have resented this second change. He had been pressured

into leaving his church in 1891 because of his socialist sermons. In his retirement in Florida, he stopped attending church because he disliked the racial bigotry he found there.

What follows is Bellamy's own account of some of the thoughts that went through his mind in August, 1892, as he picked the words of his Pledge:

It began as an intensive communing with salient points of our national history, from the Declaration of Independence onwards; with the makings of the Constitution...with the meaning of the Civil War; with the aspiration of the people...

The true reason for allegiance to the Flag is the 'republic for which it stands.' ...And what does that vast thing, the Republic mean? It is the concise political word for the Nation - the One Nation which the Civil War was fought to prove. To make that One Nation idea clear, we must specify that it is indivisible, as Webster and Lincoln used to repeat in their great speeches. And its future?

Just here arose the temptation of the historic slogan of the French Revolution which meant so much to Jefferson and his friends, 'Liberty, equality, fraternity.' No, that would be too fanciful, too many thousands of years off in realization. But we as a nation do stand square on the doctrine of liberty and justice for all...

If the Pledge's historical pattern repeats, its words will be modified during this decade. Below are two possible changes.

Some prolife advocates recite the following slightly revised Pledge: 'I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all, **born and unborn.**'

A few liberals recite a slightly revised version of Bellamy's original Pledge: 'I pledge allegiance to my Flag, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with **equality**, liberty and justice for all.'

Bibliography:

Baer, John. [The Pledge of Allegiance, A Centennial History, 1892 - 1992](#), Annapolis, Md. Free State Press, Inc., 1992.
Miller, Margarette S. [Twenty-Three Words](#), Portsmouth, Va. Printcraft Press, 1976.

For more information about the history of the Pledge, be sure to also read the three online chapters of [The Pledge of Allegiance, A Centennial History, 1892 - 1992](#) by Dr. Baer:

- o [The Youth's Companion's Pledge](#)

- o [American Socialists and Reformers](#)
- o For answers to frequently asked questions about the Pledge and/or for a book order form for this six chapter book, please see www.PledgeQandA.com

Do you have other questions or comments about the "short history" or about the chapters shown above?

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