

## **The Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance has existed since September 1892 when it appeared as an article in the patriotic magazine, *The Youth's Companion* to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival.

As part of the same campaign to spread patriotism, James Bailey Upham, editor of *The Youth's Companion*, persuaded President Benjamin Harrison in 1892 to ask the U.S. Congress to declare a national holiday in honor of "the discovery of America" – Columbus Day.

President Harrison issued a proclamation to mark the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival with patriotic festivities, in which he availed Americans to, "so far as possible, cease from toil and devote themselves to such exercises as may best express honor to the discoverer."

The Pledge was written by Francis Bellamy, an ordained Baptist minister and Socialist, who believed strongly in the separation of church and state.

Bellamy promoted the Pledge at a national conference of school superintendents, who, along with the National Education Association, launched a campaign to have it recited daily by all school children, with a hand extended in a salute called the "Bellamy salute". The campaign was adopted by almost every school in the United States.

The original ritual, as published in *The Youth's Companion*, and performed by all school children, called for the children to stand in ordered ranks, hands to their sides, facing the flag. At a signal from the principal, every student was to give the military salute: right palm lifted, palm downward, to align with the forehead. Standing thusly, as the Pledge was recited, at the words "to my flag", the right hand was extended gracefully, palm upward toward the flag to remain there until the end of the affirmation, whereupon all hands drop to the side.

The custom of the Bellamy salute was later changed to the hand-over-heart gesture because of the similarity to the Nazi salute.

Because the Pledge was written to commemorate the anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival and part of the campaign to declare Columbus Day a national holiday, it is inherently tied to Columbus Day.

The first Columbus Day celebration took place in 1792, when New York's Columbian Order, also known as Tammany Hall, held an event to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Columbus's arrival.

Taking pride in Columbus' birthplace and faith, Italian and Catholic communities in various parts of the country began organizing annual religious ceremonies and parades in his honor.

Controversy over Columbus Day dates back to the 19th century due to its association with religion. The Pledge has faced similar controversy.

Opting out of the Pledge has resulted in religious persecution: including mass incarceration; violent and deadly lynching by angry mobs; and the burning of a minority church in Kennebunkport, Maine. The American Civil Liberties Union reported to the Justice Department that nearly 1,500 people were physically attacked in more than 300 communities nationwide on the basis of religion because they refused to perform the Pledge in the 1940s.

The Pledge was written in 1892. It wasn't until 1954, during the Cold War, that President Eisenhower signed into law a measure adding "under God" to the pledge.

A congressional report accompanying the measure read: "from the time of our earliest history, our people and our institutions have reflected the traditional concept that our Nation was founded on a fundamental belief in God."

This modification has caused religious freedom to come into question. Many atheists and polytheists find reciting the pledge in its current form troubling because it contradicts their beliefs.

Bellamy was a strong supporter of the separation of church and state. Bellamy deeply considered his phrasing when choosing "One Nation, indivisible". Bellamy is quoted as posting the following statement regarding the writing of "One Nation, indivisible": I laid down my pencil and tried to pass our history in review. It took in the sayings of Washington, the arguments of Hamilton, the Webster-Hayne debate, the speeches of Seward and Lincoln, the Civil War. After many attempts, all that pictured struggle reduced itself to three words, "One Nation, indivisible." To reach that compact brevity, conveying the facts of a single nationality and of an indivisibility both of states and of common interests, was the most arduous phase of the task."

The colonization of our country lead to the wholesale slaughter of a great nation of many different people, forcing their few survivors into bleak survivor's camps in some of the most desolate parts of the country, called reservations, where many still live and die in poverty today.

The colonization of the Americas lead to the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, resulting in the enslavement and deaths of millions of innocent people through slavery.

Many black and indigenous people do not celebrate Columbus Day or Independence Day and find these holidays deeply painful reminders of the past.

The Pledge was introduced as part of the commemoration of Columbus. It should not be disassociated from the atrocities that resulted and should not fill any American's heart with pride. It was a ritual designed by a white majority with no regard to the pain it would cause minorities, because at the time it was written, minorities had no rights and were not included.

This is the history of the Pledge of Allegiance.