



Honor The Past – Build The Future

The American Flag Foundation, Inc.

The Story of the Pledge of Allegiance

Narrative

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The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States, according to James A. Moss, an authority on the Flag and its history, was first given national publicity through the official program of the National Public School Celebration of Columbus Day in October 1892. The Pledge had been published in the *Youth's Companion* for September 8, 1892, and at the same time sent out in leaflet form throughout the country. During the Celebration, it was repeated by more than 12,000,000 public school pupils in every state in the Union.

Mr. Francis Bellamy of Rome, New York, and Mr. James Upham of Malden, Massachusetts were both members of the staff of the *Youth's Companion* when the Pledge was published. The family of each man has contended that his was the authorship and both hold evidence to substantiate their claims.

To determine, in the interest of historical accuracy, the actual authorship, the United States Flag Association (formerly in Washington, D.C., but now disbanded), in 1939, appointed a committee consisting of Charles C. Tansill, Professor of American History; W. Reed West, Professor of Political Science; and Bernard Mayo, Professor of American History, to carefully weigh the evidence of the two contending families. Unanimously, the committee decided in favor of Francis Bellamy, and on May 18, 1939, the decision was accepted by the American Flag Committee. Mr. Bellamy had been chairman of the executive committee which formulated the program for the National Public School Celebration and furnished the publicity when he was on the staff of the *Youth's Companion*.

In the material which he nationally circulated, he wrote, "Let the Flag float over every school-house in the land and the exercise be such as shall impress upon our youth the patriotic duty of citizenship." He also included the original 23 words of the Pledge which he had developed [*'to' added in October, 1892*]¹.

I pledge allegiance to my Flag,
and (to¹) the Republic for which it stands:
one Nation indivisible,
With Liberty and Justice for all.

Thus it was that on Columbus Day in October 1892, the Pledge of Allegiance was repeated by more than 12 million public school children in every state in the union.

The wording of the Pledge has been modified three times.

June 14, 1923, at the First National Flag Conference held in Washington, D.C., the leadership of The American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution, changed the Pledge's words. The latter words were added on the ground that some foreign-born children and adults, when giving the Pledge, might have in mind the flag of their native land. In 1923, the words "the Flag of the United States" were substituted for "my Flag."

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States,
and to the Republic for which it stands:
one Nation indivisible,
With Liberty and Justice for all.

In 1924, "of America" was added.

I pledge allegiance to the Flag
of the United States of America,
and to the Republic for which it stands:
one Nation indivisible,
With Liberty and Justice for all.

On Flag Day June 14, 1954, the words "under God" were added.

The last change in the Pledge of Allegiance occurred on June 14 (Flag Day), 1954 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved adding the words "under God." As he authorized this change, he said, "In this way, we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way, we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war."

This was the last change made to the Pledge of Allegiance. The 23 words that had been initially penned for a Columbus Day celebration now comprised a 31-word profession of loyalty and devotion to not only our Flag, but to a way of life...the American ideal. Those words now read:

"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."

The Pledge of Allegiance continued to be recited daily by children in schools across America, and gained heightened popularity among adults during the patriotic fervor created by World War II. It was an "unofficial" pledge until June 22, 1942, when the United States Congress included the Pledge to the Flag in the United States Flag Code (Title 36). In 1945, the Pledge to the Flag received its official title as "The Pledge of Allegiance."

When the Pledge is being given, all should stand with the right hand over the heart, fingers together and horizontal with the arm at as near a right angle as possible. After the words "justice to all," the arm should drop to the side. While giving the Pledge of Allegiance, all should face the Flag.

According to Colonel Moss, no disrespect is displayed by giving the Pledge with a gloved hand over the heart, but he calls our attention to the fact that an Army Officer or an enlisted man always removes his right glove upon taking his oath as a witness. The Daughters of the American Revolution follow the custom of having the right hand ungloved.

The idea of the annual PAUSE FOR THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE originated in 1980 at the Star-Spangled Banner Flag House in Baltimore, Maryland by Mr. Louis V. Koerber, who later became one of the founders of The American Flag Foundation, Inc. Formerly the National Flag Day Foundation, the non-profit was created in 1982 "to conduct educational programs throughout the United States in promotion of National Flag Day and to encourage national patriotism by promotion of the PAUSE FOR THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE."

On June 20, 1985, the Ninety-Ninth Congress passed, and President Reagan signed, Public Law 99-54 recognizing the PAUSE FOR THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE as part of National Flag Day activities. It is an invitation urging all Americans to participate on Flag Day, June 14, 7:00 p.m. (EDT) in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Scroll to next page for Timeline matrix)

| HISTORY OF THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TIMELINE | |
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| September 8, 1892 | The Boston-based “The Youth’s Companion” magazine published anonymously though authored by Francis Bellamy (an ordained minister, magazine writer, and Freemason) a few words for students to repeat on the 400 th Anniversary of Columbus Day. <i>“I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands – one nation indivisible – with liberty and justice for all.”</i> |
| October 12, 1892 | The words were reprinted on thousands of leaflets and sent to public schools across the country. On the quadri-centennial of Columbus’ arrival, more than 12 million children recited the pledge to the Flag, thus beginning a popular school-day ritual. |
| June 14, 1923 | During the first National Flag Conference in Washington, D.C., a change was made. For clarity, due to the number of immigrants now living in the United States, the words, “ <i>the Flag of the United States</i> ” replaced “my Flag.” |
| June 14, 1924 | The words “of America” were added to read “ <i>the Flag of the United States of America.</i> ” |
| June 22, 1942 | After 50 years of daily recitation by children, the United States Congress officially recognizes the pledge by including the Pledge to the Flag in the <i>United States Flag Code (Title 36)</i> . |
| June 1943 | The Supreme Court rules that school children could not be forced to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. |
| June 14, 1945 | The Pledge to the Flag receives its official title as, “ <i>The Pledge of Allegiance.</i> ” |
| June 14, 1954 | President Dwight D. Eisenhower approves an amendment, House Joint Resolution 243, to add the words, “ <i>under God,</i> ” giving us the Pledge of Allegiance as it still reads today. As he authorized this change, he said, <i>“In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource in peace and war.”</i> |

Sources:

“The Story of the Pledge of Allegiance,” The Scottish Rite Journal of Freemasonry Southern Jurisdiction USA; Volume CIV, Number 7, July 1996.

“The Pledge of Allegiance,” Our Flag – The Story of Old Glory. Clearwater, FL; 2001.

“The Pledge of Allegiance,” www.homeofheroes.com; November 3, 2005.

“The original Pledge of Allegiance,” www.usflag.org; July 11, 2005.