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THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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October 12, 1992, will mark the 500th anniversary of Columbus discovery of the Americas. But it will also celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America. Those two events have much more in common than most Americans realize. The Pledge of Allegiance was written for the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Columbus Day and the celebration of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Both events were designed to assert the positive patriotic sentiments of the American people. Both were designed to demonstrate to the world that the United States, only 27 years after a bloody Civil War, was "one nation indivisible." And finally, both events were designed to boldly assert that the government of this nation was a "republic" whose far-sighted purposes encompassed "liberty and justice for all."

Congress authorized the grand 400th anniversary celebration of Columbus' discovery of the Americas by establishing the colossal World's Columbian Exposition to be held in Chicago in 1892. A committee of educators and civil leaders planned a National Public School Celebration of Columbus Day to mark the exposition. Chaired by Francis Bellamy, a former Baptist minister and a member of the editorial staff of *The Youth's Companion* magazine, the committee planned for celebrations in every public school to center around the flag. Bellamy composed and address to the flag published in the magazine, and he lobbied Congress to declare Columbus Day a national holiday. Largely through his own efforts a lengthy list of political leaders lent their support: including President Benjamin Harrison, former President Grover Cleveland, Henry Cabot Lodge, Theodore Roosevelt, John G. Carlisle, Roger Q. Mills, and Joseph W. Bailey. Congress passed a joint resolution empowering Pres. Harrison to proclaim the 400th anniversary of Columbus Day a national holiday with "suitable exercises



in the schools."

The Presidential Proclamation signed July 21, 1892, set aside October 21st as a general holiday to honor Columbus and "the great achievements of four completed centuries of American life." The proclamation further called for appropriate school observations on that day. "Let the National Flag float over every school house in the country, and the exercises be such as shall impress upon our youth the patriotic duties of American citizenship."

As Bellamy planned the program for these school exercises, he wrestled with the composition of suitable pledge to the flag to be recited by every student in the public schools. One flag salute had been in general use, but Bellamy found it inadequate. He shut himself up in his office one August night and in two hours composed the 23 words that became the pledge of Allegiance. He decided to make it a pledge of allegiance rather than a salute because of the memories of the Civil War. A pledge was a stronger and more positive expression. Instead of "the flag," Bellamy chose "my flag" for emphasis. In a brief, rhythmic, and easily memorized statement, Bellamy encapsulated the fundamental meaning of the nation:

"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all."

The phrase "one Nation indivisible" harkened back to the hard-won lessons of the Civil War, while, "Liberty and Justice for all" admirably expressed the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution. Minor modifications to the Pledge were made in 1923 and 1924 by the First and Second National Flag Conferences, when "my Flag" was changed to "the Flag of the United States (1923) of America (1924)." The Pledge was officially recognized by Congress in 1945 when by Public Law 287 it became our national Pledge of Allegiance. In 1954 following a suggestion made by Rev. Peter Marshall the words "under God" were added after "one nation" in an act signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Francis Bellamy never sought to capitalize on his authorship of the pledge. It was published anonymously in *The Youth's companion* and the author did not copyright his creation. "I have the happiness of realizing that I once, in my young manhood," he later wrote, "contributed to my Country an easily remembered symbol of patriotism which has become historic and has been in many millions of individuals a spur to their love of Country."

When you stop to consider what the words to the Pledge of Allegiance mean, you can see why it has become our ultimate expression of patriotic sentiment. First and foremost is the Flag itself, the very symbol of all that the United States has been and what it can be; then the "Republic for which it stands," a phrase that calls to mind the Constitution of the United States and the creation of our national government. "One nation under God, indivisible," recalls the Civil War fought to preserve our republic and to extend the blessing of liberty to those to whom it had too long been denied. The final phrase, "with liberty and justice for all," speaks to the noblest ideals of the American experience, always inspiring and representative of the best our nation strives to attain.

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