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The Origins of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Paul Zurheide

History 400

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Introduction:

Nearly every morning across the United States a very strange ritual occurs that has taken place for over a century. Before their school day begins, children of all ages across the nation place their right hands over their hearts and stand facing the nation's flag. In unison, they recite:

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.

While flag salutes in and of themselves are not uncommon, in most countries they are far more likely to be performed by soldiers in a military setting, rather than by children in school. As Richard J. Ellis author of, *To The Flag: The Unlikely History of The Pledge of Allegiance*, pointed out in an interview, “most western liberal democracies don't have their children start the day by pledging allegiance to the nation.”¹ Indeed, forcing children to perform a flag salute every school day could, to many who did not grow up doing it, seem like a part of life in a totalitarian dictatorship rather than in a country that calls itself “the land of the free.”

To some, the Pledge of Allegiance is a patriotic celebration of the nation, as it was advertised since its beginning. However, it is not simply a salute to a flag. It is also vow of loyalty to the nation, a vow that is consistently repeated by schoolchildren to ensure that loyalty is ingrained in them from the start, before they can even cognitively grasp the meaning of a vow,

¹ Richard J. Ellis “Richard J. Ellis and the Pledge of Allegiance,” interviewed by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, NPR, June 28, 2005 <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4721408>, (accessed November 28, 2020).

loyalty, or even the nation. This is because when the Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892, the United States, and its people, were undergoing tremendous change. It was becoming a nation of executives and laborers, businessmen and consumers. It was becoming a nation of new immigrants and new ideas. To those without power, that change was opportunity, but for those who enjoyed power and privilege that change was perceived as a threat. In this era, the Pledge of Allegiance was written and spread as a way to make patriots of new Americans to ensure that those newcomers did not change the whole fabric of the nation. As those self-proclaimed defenders of the nation advocated the Pledge of Allegiance for this nationalizing purpose it, however, became a source of division rather than unity as certain groups pushed back against attempts to compel their children to recite it. Because the flag is a symbol and symbols are open to interpretation, different segments of the population sought to ensure that their version of the flag, along with what their version of what being an American means, would be recognized. They sought to have a voice in what people were pledging both allegiance and obedience to in these years of rapid change.

A Changing Nation: The Context for the Creation of the Pledge.

The Pledge of Allegiance has not always been a part of America's history, nor was it created directly a result of the Civil War that divided the United States in the mid-19th century. When it was written in 1892, it was not by politicians in Washington, nor by any soldier who had known war, but by writers of a children's magazine. The story of how the Pledge of Allegiance came into being is uniquely American and came about during a unique moment in American history.

In the decades following the Civil War, the second industrial revolution had redefined the landscape. A transcontinental railroad had opened up the land and brought new towns and cities with it where only wilderness lived before. The leaders of industry behind this industrial shift had transformed the very definition of what it meant to be making a living in America. To be an American was once defined as being able to support yourself; in this new economy making a living as a wage worker had started to become the new normal. The transition had not been a smooth one, as unsanitary and unfair working conditions had been causing an increase in friction between owners and laborers, which came to a crescendo in 1886 in what was known as “the great upheaval.”²

As James Green, author of *Death in the Haymarket* explains, “Beginning in March of 1886, a strange enthusiasm took hold of wage earning people across the nation.” Thousands of workers across the nation were striking for better conditions, specifically an eight-hour workday. “It peaked on May 1, when 350,000 laborers from coast to coast joined in a coordinated general strike for the eight hour day.”³ The city of Chicago, at the center of the US railway system was a boomtown of industrial growth, and it became the epicenter of the Great Upheaval. May 1st was peaceful, and the strikes and marches for the eight-hour day continued until May 3rd. On that day tensions rose, and a melee broke out outside of one business between strikers and strike breakers, resulting in police killing four of the strikers. The next day a group of anarchists amassed in Haymarket square to protest the killing. No one knows who did it, but a bomb was thrown into the middle of the meeting, causing the police to attack the protesters. At the end of the chaos, six

² James R. Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 146.

³ Ibid

policemen were dead, shot by their own men in the chaos. Several prominent anarchists were blamed and put to death.⁴

As historian John Higham described, “the labor upheaval that began in 1885 ushered in a decade of massive and recurrent discontent.”⁵ Not only did that discontent grow, it also grew organized. Following the events of the Haymarket affair, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was founded. At its height, the AFL would include “over 100 unions ranging from the United Mine Workers, with a quarter of a million members, to the tiny Elevator Conductors and Starters.”⁶ The AFL was organized and vast, allowing for a greater impact for laborers. Instead of small pockets of laborers fighting for fairer working conditions, the AFL could rally laborers across the country for a single cause. The AFL defined itself in three ways, “the patriotic producer, the mobilized wage earner, and the defender of rights that belonged to all American citizens” against their perceived enemies, “holders of corporate wealth and those government officials who did rich men’s bidding.” Though the ALF tried to keep their labor strikes peaceful, they were up against powerful enemies, and so “from the AFL’s creation in the mid 1880s until the 1930s, its member unions never expect either the cooperation of industrial employers or the benevolent neutrality of the state.”⁷ The rise of labor unions was a clear threat to the corporate elite, and in the war of public opinion they aimed to ensure it was the AFL and the labor unions, and not them, who appeared Unamerican.

⁴ Ibid, 176-190.

⁵ John Higham, “Origins of Immigration Restriction, 1882-1897: A Social Analysis,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Jun. 1952): 85.

⁶ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, rev. edition 2017), 52.

⁷ Ibid, 53.

By 1892, the unrest among the working class was joined by the discontent among farmers in the American South and West and took on the shape of a distinct political movement. A new political party, The People's Party, officially formed that year. "This was not a unique occurrence. Third parties were common ... features of the frenzied political landscape of the late nineteenth century," wrote historian Michael Kazin, "but the People's Party ... appeared to be, at least potentially, a much broader vehicle than its predecessors, one capable of speaking to and for the millions of Americans who were alienated from the corporate order that had grown to maturity since the Civil War."⁸ The party's rarity was that it had become a threat to those in political power. The People's Party was a grassroots coalition built around the interests of the farmers who had suffered during the agrarian crisis of the 1870s and 1880s that was, in part, a result of the mechanization of farming made possible by the industrial revolution. Farmers could grow more and get those products to more distant markets via the railroad, but soon saw the price for their crops plummet as supply outstripped demand. They aimed their protests, which they organized into a political movement by the early 1890s, at both the railroads, which charged them exorbitant rates, and the banks, which denied them much needed credit.⁹ They thus positioned themselves against the interests of those in corporate power. Their platform called for wresting back "the fruits of the toil of millions" that were "boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few," as they believed "wealth belongs to him who creates it."¹⁰

The ideas expressed by the Populists thus included the condemnation of monopoly and the demand that those who created the nation's wealth should benefit from it. As such, they

⁸ Ibid, 27-28.

⁹ Ibid, 30-34.

¹⁰ Populist Party Platform, 1892, <http://sageamericanhistory.net/gildedage/documents/PopulistPlat1892.html>, (accessed on March 21, 2021).

shared much in common with the trade unionists of the AFL who advanced the labor theory of value to justify their call for bread-and-butter gains. Their rhetoric may have verged on the radical at times, but their positions were quite distinct from those other industrial workers who called for the ultimate overthrow of the capitalist system and ushering in of a socialist commonwealth. Socialism, along with another popular anti-capitalist system anarchism, had gained quite a following throughout southern and eastern Europe, regions of the world from which record numbers of people had been immigrating to the United States since the 1870s. Under the Socialist form of thinking, power and governance should come from the bottom. Since the workers were producers of the wealth, it was they who should be in control of it as well. The Chicago Anarchist movement grew from the Socialists, but their views were more extreme. “Anarchists proclaimed that true freedom in a socialist society could be gained in self-governing communities and workplaces where working people determined their rights and responsibilities democratically, without the domination of a powerful nation state with its judges and laws, its police forces and armies.”¹¹ These systems went against the democratic and capitalist systems America was founded on, and the popularization of these ideas in America grew at the same time a large number of citizens from southern and eastern Europe were also coming to the United States.

The number of immigrants coming into America had steadily increased since the Civil War. All in all, “nearly 12 million immigrants arrived in the United States between 1870 and 1900.”¹² This was not the first immigration wave to hit US shores, but before this period

¹¹ Green, *Death in the Haymarket*, 129.

¹² “Immigration to the United States, 1851 – 1900,” *Loc.gov* Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/rise-of-industrial-america-1876-1900/immigration-to-united-states-1851-1900/> (accessed March 22, 2021).

immigrants were primarily from Western Europe. Being from the same region as America's original European settlers allowed the first wave, or "old immigrants" to easily blend in with the native population. The "new immigrants" emigrating from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean did not blend as easily. They had darker skin, different styles of dress, and different ways of wearing their hair and beards. Many of their languages, customs, and of course their politics and beliefs were new and considered frightening to some Americans at the time.

Many Americans looked at this new breed of immigrant, and pinned blame for the social, economic and political unrest of the Great Upheaval, including the Haymarket incident, and the Populist movement upon them. As Higham argues, "Many blamed all of the major strikes of this period on foreign influence."¹³ The anti-capitalist sentiments that the socialist and anarchist movements in particular represented were so far removed from what this nation was supposed to stand for, that many Americans were "unwilling to recognize them as indigenous, and unready to deal with them as such." Thus "many Americans surrendered to the conviction that they came from abroad."¹⁴ And with the Civil War still in many Americans' memories, people feared where these new political and economic divisions could lead the nation. Therefore, an anti-immigrant sentiment grew throughout America in these years as well.

Debate arose about what to do with the mass of immigrants coming into the nation. Many had been forced to move into dangerously overcrowded urban ghettos, such as the tenements of New York City. These quickly became centers of poverty, crime, and disease. Even those who were compassionate to their plight were at a loss for what could be done to help them. As Higham explains, "For many years relief agencies in eastern cities had been more or less

¹³ Higham, "Origins of Immigration Restriction," 85.

¹⁴ Ibid.

constantly concerned at the strain which impoverished and disorganized immigrants imposed upon their own financial resources and upon the life of the community.”¹⁵ As money was not helping improve the immigrant condition, a popular line of thinking formed that a fundamental change of the immigrants themselves would be necessary if they were to survive in America.

This ethnocentric perspective toward outside cultures was very common in this era. Many in the Progressive movement, a group of experts from various professional fields in the middle and upper ranks of society who sought to help the those in the lower classes, felt that the only way for immigrant populations to succeed in this country was for them to blend in. In his celebrated expose, *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis, one of the most well-known Progressives, made many of his determinations as to whether groups of immigrants had any hope in this country dependent on whether or not they could integrate as good, Christian Americans. Riis had a tendency to stereotype and generalize different immigrant groups, a common occurrence among well-meaning progressives at the time, perpetuated by the popularity of Riis’ book. For example, of Italian immigrants, he characterized them as ignorant suckers meant to be preyed upon by “sharper” men. He says of Italians, “he not only knows no word of English, but he does not know enough to learn.”¹⁶ Despite the ingrained prejudices displayed, the goal of Riis and the other Progressives was not to look down upon these immigrants, nor give others cause to. Rather, Riis’ aim was to encourage sympathy for them, so that they could be helped. The only hope, in the Progressive line of thinking, was for these immigrants to become civilized by adopting Protestant, American values. If the immigrants themselves were considered to ignorant

¹⁵ Higham, “Origins of Immigration Restriction,” 79.

¹⁶ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives; Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1890), 49.

to be civilized, the goal in New York City became to reach these immigrants through their children.

Patriotic Education: The Creation and Dissemination of the Pledge.

Many shared Riis' point of view that making a group of immigrants effective equated to their adopting certain American ideals and converting to a Protestant Christian faith. Among those were Colonel George T. Balch, a veteran of the Union Army during the Civil War who, by 1890, had become auditor for the New York City board of education. According to Ellis, Balch, like many in his generation in the North, remembered the Civil War "as a time of tremendous patriotism, self-sacrifice, and national unity." Balch feared that in the years since, with industry and consumerism taking hold of the population and unparalleled immigration coming into the country, "sterner patriotic virtues were being neglected" and "that national security was threatened by the huge influx of immigrants to whom the patriotic sacrifices of the Civil War meant little."¹⁷ Balch believed, through his experience in the New York City schools, that the way to nationalize these new immigrants was through the children.

Ellis determined that "by 1880, immigrants and their children ... constituted four-fifths of the city's population."¹⁸ And Balch, in his role within the New York Public Schools, was able to get a first-hand view of the immigrant population, mostly through the children. In 1890, Balch described these immigrants in his guide for teaching patriotism, *Methods of Teaching Patriotism in the Public Schools*, as bearing "in their physical and mental features the indelible impress of

¹⁷ Richard J. Ellis, *To the Flag: The Unlikely History of the Pledge of Allegiance* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 4.

¹⁸ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 38.

centuries of monarchial or aristocratic rule and oppression.”¹⁹ He was not blaming the immigrants themselves for what he perceived as their mental limitations, he blamed the societies from which they came. He feared that enough immigrants with enough foreign ideas would ultimately prove a threat to American society. For this reason, he saw patriotic education as a way to “protect us from the evils and dangers” brought about by “investing large numbers of the more ignorant and untrained of these accessions to our population.”²⁰ His intention was to teach immigrants to be more like Americans, not only to help them, but also to avoid diluting the American way of life.

Since he believed that the adult immigrants were too limited to be educated, it was the children of the immigrants whom he saw as the best group to integrate into American ideals. It was through this line of thinking that patriotic education, including the Pledge of Allegiance, became popularized. And he had an earlier model to look to for inspiration. Col. Balch spoke of the effects that the schools of The Children’s Aid Society in New York had on some of these children, turning them from “bad-tempered, filthy, infested with vermin, and sometimes impudent and ungrateful” beings into children that are “cleaner, better behaved ... They can read and sew, some can write; sweet songs of purity and religion are learned, which are sung again in their squalid homes.”²¹ It was this last part, the children taking the lessons learned in the school back into the immigrant homes, is what he found most interesting. The work of these teachers in New York was “elevating the social condition, not only of the pupils under its care, but

¹⁹ George T. Balch, *Methods of Teaching Patriotism in the Public Schools: Being and Extract from an Address Delivered Before the Teachers of the Children’s Aid Society of the City of New York* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1890), viii.

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Methods_of_Teaching_Patriotism_in_the_Pu/yQ8CAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1 (accessed November 13, 2020).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Balch, *Methods of Teaching Patriotism*, xxv.

indirectly, through them ... the substratum of our civilization in this metropolis.”²² He saw the children as being willing to take in the American ideals, and the children would then influence the parents. So, those teachers promoted a patriotic education among these children with the intention that their students would bring these ideals back to their communities. Ideally a love for America would replace the love those immigrants had for their own ethnic heritage.

Patriotism requires a love of the nation that one is a part of, but Balch recognized that the limits of a child’s cognitive abilities did not allow them to recognize the meaning of an abstract concept such as nation.²³ This is why Balch needed to find an object, something tangible, for the child to connect with that would represent the nation. For this reason, Balch chose the American flag because he saw it as “the sole symbol of the greatness of this nation, in all its majesty and its sovereignty.”²⁴ He felt that by having the children participate in a ritual based around the flag it would embed a love for the flag because “nothing ... impresses the youthful mind and excites its emotions more forcible or permanently than the observance of form and ceremony.”²⁵ When the children got older, that love for the flag and ceremony surrounding it would develop into a love for America. Balch popularized his ideas for patriotic education in his guide for teachers, *Methods of Teaching Patriotism in the Public Schools*, in 1890. The method Balch found most effective, and what he described in great detail, was how he “introduced an American flag salute in his New York City kindergarten class, requiring students to stretch out their right arm while pledging, ‘We give our heads and our hearts to God and our country; one country, one language,

²² Ibid, xxxii.

²³ Ibid, 5.

²⁴ Ibid, 3.

²⁵ Ibid, 32.

one Flag.”²⁶ His version of the pledge would not endure but his ideas about patriotic education certainly lasted.

Col. Balch’s promotion of patriotic education coincided with a concurrent campaign by *Youth’s Companion* magazine. The magazine was extremely popular with the youth of the 1890’s. In his article “Youth Periodicals, Patriotism, and the Textual Mechanics of Civic Mobilization,” Philip Keirle states that “in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the *Youth’s Companion* was one of the nation’s longest running and widely subscribed to periodicals ... during the 1890s, the *Companion* was distributed weekly to well in excess of five hundred thousand households.”²⁷ While the *Companion*’s popularity was certainly in part due to “the exceptional quality of contributors, [and] the visual quality of the magazine,”²⁸ the magazine’s editor, Daniel Sharp Ford, also excelled at marketing. “Central to the magazine’s success was its innovative use of premiums to attract subscribers.”²⁹ The magazine featured an exciting array of goods that kids could purchase at a deep discount in exchange for the selling subscriptions to their friends and neighbors, surely all but excluding children living in poorer neighborhoods from participating. Beginning in 1888, one of those items was an American Flag. Among other sized flags, “a 3-by-5-foot bunting flag could be obtained for two dollars, or for two

²⁶ Stephen A. Smith, "Patriotism, Pledging Allegiance, and Public Schools: Lessons from Washington County in the 1940s," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2005): 49-50. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40018559> (accessed November 15, 2020).

²⁷ Philip Keirle, "Youth Periodicals, Patriotism, and the Textual Mechanics of Civic Mobilization," in *American Periodicals* 22, no. 1 (2012): 31, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/stable/23461238> (accessed February 27, 2021).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 5.

subscriptions and seventy-five cents.”³⁰ The flag was a mainstay for the *Companion*’s premium department over the next few years, and their push to promote it grew as its popularity expanded.

The head of the premiums department was Ford’s nephew, James Upham. Upham had a knack for finding the items that would grab the children’s attention and sell more magazines. But his push for the flag as one of those items was rooted in a more personal motive. When Upham was a child, during the Civil War, he remembered the great impression the patriotism of wartime had on him as a boy. “Every Friday, ‘in the little red school house’ of his youth ‘some boy declaimed [Daniel] Webster’s speeches about the Union and the forefathers.’” Now he saw the immigrant children of the day who knew nothing of the forefathers, and a nation that, he believed, had turned from valuing patriotism to becoming obsessed with consumerism. Upham was not wrong, the country’s evolution into a nation of wage workers changed not only how people had made a living, it also changed the very way people lived. Industry did not emerge in a vacuum; in order to produce something, there must also be consumers. While the working class was struggling, the middle class was consuming. As historian William Leach put it, there was “a vast culture of consumption. Forged by merchants in the company of enthusiastic politicians, reformers, educators, and artists, this capitalist culture was so powerful as nearly to dwarf all alternative cultures.”³¹ Upham, who was distressed by what he saw as the distractions of this consumerism, saw patriotism as the way to inspire the nation as he was once inspired.³² His aim was to return America to the values he cherished. Though in order to achieve this Upham would

³⁰ Ibid, 6.

³¹ William R. Leach, “Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925,” *The Journal of American History* 71, No. 2 (1984): 319-320, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1901758> (accessed May 09, 2021).

³² Ellis, *To the Flag*, 7.

not only utilize the methods of those behind consumer culture, but he would also align himself with them as well.

While Upham was sold on the effectiveness of the flag movement, Ford was less convinced. Ellis writes that Ford was very hands on in the editorial process, so while the 1889 editorial entitled “Teaching Patriotism” has no author, it was most likely, at the very least, approved by Ford. In this editorial, the *Companion* criticized Balch and his flag ceremonies concluding that “there were far more fitting and more effective ways to teach patriotism, beginning with improving instruction of American history.”³³ Upham, however, believed in the flag movement and wanted to support it by using the reach and influence of the magazine. To settle the dispute between Ford and Upham the *Companion* found a way to gauge what their subscribers thought about the flag movement.

In January 1890, the *Companion* launched an essay contest open to children in every state. The contest called for essays of 600 words to be written on the topic, “The patriotic influence of the American Flag when raised over the Public School.” The winner’s school would receive a 9x15 flag. Though, an initial deadline was set for April 1, due to a large response the essay contest was extended. Children in all US States and territories were invited to participate, with the winner to be announced in the July 4th issue.³⁴ As Philip Keirle points out, “the competition provided a mechanism through which the *Companion* received feedback on the circulation of this message.” Though both, the number of essays received it could gauge the extent of children’s interest in the subject. And in the content of the submissions it could see how children were interpreting the message of the flag movement.³⁵ In the winning essay from New

³³ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 6.

³⁴ Keirle, *American Periodicals*, 35-36.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

York, Louis V. Fox from Grammar school 63 on 3rd and 173rd in the Bronx wrote, ““On coming to school and seeing the “stars and stripes” ... what boy would not pause in admiration and think of the glorious battles in which the same beautiful banner was so triumphantly waved—at Stony Point, Saratoga, and the mastheads of Paul Jones’ gallant ships ... and then he would think of what that flag represented ... a country where everyone is free! ... A county where men have equal chances to win in the struggle of life.””³⁶ The essay showed that the message men like Upham and Balch wanted the children to grasp was getting through clearly, at least to native born boys educated in American history. Ford agreed to let Upham pursue the flag movement and by the end of 1890, the *Youth’s Companion* became the country’s main advocate for a flag over every schoolhouse.

Starting with the July 4, 1890 issue, with its cover dedicated to “Raising the School House Flag,” that featured drawings of patriotic images and cheering children as their flag is hoisted to the top of their flagpole the *Companion* took up the cause of the flag movement. This issue itself contained not only the winning essay, but several stories, fiction and non-fiction, relating the flag to patriotic values.³⁷ Building on this promotion of the flag, Upham set a new plan in motion. In December of 1890, the *Companion* set as its goal to have a flag over every schoolhouse by in October of 1892 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus discovering the Americas.³⁸ In March of the following year, he set in to motion the plan by which children could obtain their flags, while also ensuring the venture would be profitable for the magazine.

³⁶ Balch, *Methods of Teaching Patriotism*, 78-80.

³⁷ “Raising the Schoolhouse Flag” *The Youth’s Companion*, July 3 1890, Front Cover in *American Periodicals*, 37.

³⁸ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 8.

He announced the campaign in the March 1891 issue. “School Boys! School Girls!” begins the article in bold print. “Do you wish to raise a Flag over your Schoolhouse? ... Then write to us and tell us of your decision and ask us to send you 100 School Flag Certificates.” The certificates the students would then receive read: “This Certificate entitles the holder to a SHARE in the patriotic influences of the SCHOOL FLAG.” The certificates were sent to the child for free, and that child would then sell those certificates for 10 cents apiece. The \$10.00 raised would be sent to the *Youth’s Companion* in exchange for a 16-foot flag. It concluded, “Get your Flag, and thus be ready for the National Columbus Public School Celebration.”³⁹ For Upham, it was an ingenious tactic to promote the idea of linking the flag with patriotism, and to give the kids themselves a personal stake in its success.

Yet, one must wonder whether Upham saw the hypocrisy of his tactic. Upham’s desire to promote patriotism stemmed from his belief that consumerism was destroying the nation. Yet here he was having children sell shares of patriotism. He was training young capitalists as much as he was training young patriots, and all in the name of profit for his uncle’s magazine. In his quest to repatriate the nation, he was remaking patriotism in consumerism’s image.

Shortly after the success of his first flag campaign, the *Companion* hired 35-year-old Francis Bellamy, a Christian Socialist. Bellamy had been a pastor before he joined the *Companion*, but he had not found a warm reception from churchgoing Bostonians when he delivered his sermons about “Jesus the Socialist.”⁴⁰ One in his congregation, however was Daniel Sharp Ford, “who admired Bellamy’s command of language, both written and spoken.”

³⁹ “Do You Wish to Raise a Flag Over Your Schoolhouse?” *The Youth’s Companion* 64, March 19, 1891, 165.

⁴⁰ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 9.

Despite having no background in publishing or business, Ford hired him to work at the *Companion*.⁴¹

At the *Companion*, Bellamy was placed in the office alongside Upham, and the men formed an excellent working relationship. Bellamy and Upham both came from families that could be traced back to the original colonies and both men took great pride in their American heritage. Each man was also “brought up in households in which religion mattered profoundly. For both men, religion was not just a private faith but a public outlook and critical standard by which to judge the ethical standards of a commercial society.”⁴² Bellamy, like Balch, had a nativist attitude and anxieties regarding the new immigrants.⁴³ He, like Upham, felt that the schools were essential to preserving American values, saying in a speech to the National Teachers’ Association in 1892, “The demand upon the public school to-day is the systematic training of citizens ... the time has come where the highest ideals of American citizenship should be a part of the curriculum.”⁴⁴

Bellamy’s political views however were considered radical. His cousin, Edward Bellamy, had written a utopian novel entitled *Looking Backward*, in which by the year 2000, America becomes an egalitarian society where industry “is organized along military lines,” and machinery allows for minimal work hours. People live a leisurely, orderly life free from “all of the social problems that had beset late-nineteenth-century America.” Nationalist clubs formed promoting this vision, and in Boston, Francis Bellamy was a charter member. There he called “for a new

⁴¹ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 10.

⁴² Ellis, *To the Flag*, 11.

⁴³ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 33.

⁴⁴ Francis Bellamy “The Coming School-Master,” in *Columbian Selections: American Patriotism. For Home and School*, ed. Henry B. Carrington (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1892), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433066603121&view=1up&seq=9> (accessed November 29, 2020).

and explicitly Christian organization dedicated to these principles”, and formed the Christian Socialist, whose objective was to connect the teachings of Christ to the teachings of Marx. While his views did not suddenly change once he went to work for *The Youth’s Companion*, his work with the Christian Socialists ceased.⁴⁵

Together, Bellamy and Upham, both believing themselves to be crusading against consumerism, went on a promotional blitz for the event to drum up support outside of even the far reaches of *The Youth’s Companion*. Bellamy gave speeches to education boards, wrote to every state school superintendent, and reached out to patriotic organizations to promote the celebration.⁴⁶ He even spoke with President Benjamin Harrison. Harrison had been impressed by Col. Balch’s flag ceremonies and showed his support. To drum up more support and excitement for Columbus Day, Bellamy lobbied Congress to declare October 12, 1892 as a national holiday, which was a partial success. Congress determined that Columbus actually reached America on October 21st, meaning the *Companion* would need to change the date of their event.⁴⁷

All the while, the *Companion* continued to publish stories promoting the importance of the event, and people’s dedication towards it. In the issue from January 14, 1892, the editors published a fictitious story of a school mistress whose flag was cut down. In response, the townspeople banded together in order to purchase and present her with a new flag. Upon receipt, the school mistress “not only raised the new flagstaff and flag, but she got a Winchester rifle, with which to defend it if need be.” The *Companion* wanted to do two things with this story: the first is to invoke the image of the patriotic defender, the soldier at arms who had defended the nation in the great wars of America’s past, and connect it directly to the schools. The second was

⁴⁵ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 26-27.

⁴⁶ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 13-15.

⁴⁷ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 16-17.

to clearly display how important the flag was. It was so important that a woman would take up arms to defend it, then it was important enough for the reader to do everything in their power to possess one as well.

By January 1892, the editors of *The Companion* claimed that they had aided thousands of schools in obtaining a flag through their flag certificate plan.⁴⁸ By May, they warned readers, “Don’t let your school be left out,” and promised that the Executive Committee on the Celebration would be sending schools the Official Program for the big 400th anniversary of Columbus’ landing in the Americas.⁴⁹ The program was put together by Bellamy in the late summer of 1892. A “Song of Columbus” was included from a longtime writer for the *Companion*, Rev. Theron Brown. An address on “the importance of four centuries” was included, written by Bellamy. The last thing to be composed for the ceremony was the salute, itself.⁵⁰ Balch’s salute was used throughout many schools in New York City but, as Ellis explains, Bellamy “dismissed Balch’s formula as a ‘petty childish form of words, invented by an ex-military officer.’ He wanted a pledge that would resonate with American history and make students into active participants in a ‘social citizenry.’”⁵¹ Upham attempted to write one but could not write a salute he felt was worthy of the flag. The deadline for the program loomed, and Bellamy gave it a shot. After being locked away for two hours, he emerged with a salute for the occasion:

⁴⁸ “Raise the Schoolhouse Flag” *The Youth’s Companion* 65, January 14, 1892, 27.

⁴⁹ “Is Your School to Celebrate?” *The Youth’s Companion* 65, May 26, 1892, 269.

⁵⁰ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 16-17.

⁵¹ Cecilia O’Leary and Tony Platt, “Pledging Allegiance: The Revival of Prescriptive Patriotism,” *Social Justice* 28, no. 3 (85) (2001): 42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768091>, (accessed November 29, 2020).

“I pledge allegiance to my Flag and to the Republic for which it stands- one Nation indivisible- with Liberty and Justice for all.”⁵²

The line “with Liberty and Justice for all” was Bellamy’s attempt to promote his egalitarian vision of America within the pledge. “Bellamy later said that when writing the Pledge he had initially thought to borrow the ‘historic slogan of the French Revolution ... ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’” but had decided that invoking equality and fraternity would be too controversial and too fanciful.”⁵³ The United states was still very far from anything resembling equality in 1892, and most reformers didn’t see that as their aim. Like Bellamy himself, many had nativist attitudes and felt that if a man wanted to be equal, he would have to look and behave in an “American” fashion.

Upham’s plan to have a nationwide recitation of the pledge coordinated on the quadricentennial of Columbus’ arrival in the Americas was intended to signal more than just a celebration of the anniversary; it was also planned for the same day as the dedication of the 1892 Columbus World Exposition in Chicago. This exposition was a massive event, years in the making, that had been planned and financed by Chicago’s civil, business, and social elite. As historian Ellen Litwicky explains, “They were financiers and attorneys, investors in real estate, traders in commodities, and presidents of banks and merchandising and manufacturing concerns.”⁵⁴ The expectations for the event were high to say the least. Architect Daniel H. Burnham, chief of construction for the event claimed, “that after the Revolution and the Civil

⁵² Ellis, *To the Flag*, 18-19.

⁵³ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 28-29.

⁵⁴ Ellen M. Litwicky, *America’s Public Holidays, 1865-1920* (Washington D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 153.

War it constituted the third great event of American history.”⁵⁵ While his opinion on the matter may have been biased, the scale of the event was certainly enough to back up his claim. It cost “an estimated forty-six million dollars,” and brought together a number of the most prestigious architects, designers, and artists of the time for the purpose of creating “a grandiose display that would trumpet Chicago and America’s cultural achievements to the world.”⁵⁶ The World’s Fair, as it was known was an extraordinary success “Paid admissions totaled 21,480,141 as people flocked from throughout the nation and abroad.”⁵⁷

It was Upham’s idea to have the nationwide pledge coincide with the dedication of the World’s Fair. For one, it was an advertising tactic; it linked the two events, allowing the national pledge to absorb some of the enthusiasm for the World’s Fair. Secondly, Ellis argues, “it was a profound statement of his values,” as he felt that the expo “was biased toward display of the technological wonders and material advancements of the nineteenth century. As such, in Upham’s eyes, the exposition was a symptom of the materialism of the time.”⁵⁸ Upham saw the massive buildings of “the white city” the center of the fair and believed it to only be about America’s technological ingenuity. So, once again, Upham believed himself to be supporting patriotism over capitalism by coordinating the recitation of the pledge with the opening of this massive display of material advancement. But in fact he was, once again, really linking the two together. He felt that the flag salute would remind Americans of the ideals he believed they were meant to hold dear and would thus stand in opposition to the expo. However, those behind the

⁵⁵ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*, 17. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁸ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 8.

expo were also billing the event as a lesson in patriotism and would collapse the distinction between the patriotism and capitalist development.

In much the same way as Col. Balch felt patriotism was the key to dealing with immigrants, Chicago's elite came to the conclusion that outward expressions of loyalty to the nation were needed to discipline those whom they saw as wayward citizens. These wayward citizens included recent immigrants and militant industrial workers. The elites sought law and order in Chicago, but had difficulty achieving it. In the years following the Haymarket affair, those in power continued to push the narrative that the violence was incited by the anarchists, most of whom were immigrants. This narrative gained some traction in public opinion. For example, in order to promote law and order in their city, the *Chicago Tribune's* publisher, Joseph Medill came up with the idea to erect a statue as a tribute to the officers who died on Memorial Day of 1889, commemorating them as heroes. Roughly two thousand people attended the ceremony. But a counter narrative was constructed by workers and radicals that competed for control in the city. Four years later, in 1893, a monument was erected at the graves of the anarchists who were tried and executed "for the crime of preaching anarchy and radical socialism." All in all, over 8,000 people attended that ceremony.⁵⁹

Ellen Litwicki explains, how it was in this context of socio-economic change and radical political developments, that Chicago's civic leaders were determined to take back control over their city and "turn the ignorant masses into good citizens and good Americans."⁶⁰ Their wealth and influence allowed them to go much further than a simple flag salute outside of schools; instead, their plan was "to address this problem by organizing centralized celebrations in an

⁵⁹ Litwicki, *America's Public Holidays*, 149-150.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 150.

effort to transform patriotic holidays into vehicles for the creation of urban order and unity ... as organizers of such occasions, they could script the holiday celebrations so as to construct a transcendent national identity that overrode the ethnic, racial, sectional, and class loyalties that they thought were destroying the nation.”⁶¹ Their aim was to rid the nation of the dangers of competing ethnic, class-based or radical political identities and replace them with the idea of America the melting pot. To advance this aim, James Upham’s scheme for the nationwide recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance was a perfect complement to their grand plan of patriotic assimilation that was behind their organizing the World’s Fair. Upham may not have been aware of this connection, because the World’s Fair, along with the dedication ceremony, was not advertised as a celebration of law and order, but, as Litwicky’s research shows, it was one that the elites made and hoped to advance.

The dedication of the fair took place over four days. Wednesday, October 19th, the public schools of Chicago celebrated Columbus Day, followed by an inaugural reception that evening. Thursday a civic parade was held, in which 80,000 men and women marched. That evening a reception and ball was held for members of the military, while a separate dinner for distinguished guests was thrown by the Fellowship club. The 21st was the main event, the official dedication day when all of the guests would be brought onto the fairground to be the first to witness the construction of the White City of the fairgrounds. That main event was followed by speeches, patriotic music, and prayer. It was during this day that the Pledge was meant to be said by schoolchildren across the country. That evening in Chicago, there would be fireworks throughout

⁶¹ Ibid, 149-150.

the city and more ceremonies. Saturday, the final day, included more formal dedications and military displays.⁶²

The *Chicago Tribune*, whose publisher Medill was one of the civil elites behind the World's Fair, in describing the dedication ceremony, proclaimed:

The guns that saluted the rising sun over the waters of Lake Michigan yesterday morning announced not only the dedication of the World's Columbian Exposition, but the beginning of the world's millennium. That is to say, the booming of the cannon ushered in a new era in the world's history. It proclaimed more than the celebration of America's discovery; more than the achievement of America itself in material matters; it proclaimed the confirmation of the "government of the people, for the people" –in fact, the inauguration of the people's age. Historians yet unborn may date from the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in October, 1892, the millennium of universal liberty and the brotherhood of man.⁶³

The dedication of the World's Fair was thus heralded as a celebration for all mankind, as the beginning of a new era. The Chicago elites sought to cement their place on the side of democracy, Americanism, and humanity with this event. This event was their ultimate show against the AFL and other populist movements by loudly proclaiming that history will look back and see that it was the civic elites of Chicago, not the unions, that truly brought about "the

⁶² "Program for Dedication Week," *The Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 16, 1892, 12.

⁶³ "Dedication: Exposition Buildings Presented by the Columbian Commission to the Nation" *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct. 22, 1892, 1.

people's age. These ideas of "universal liberty and the brotherhood of man" are surely what attracted Bellamy, with his own dream of a utopian future to attach himself and his work to this event. However, while this "new era" of egalitarianism was claimed by the *Tribune*, this celebration of the world was definitely one presented with America at its center, in which the democratic form of government that became the nation's hallmark many centuries after Columbus' arrival was celebrated, rather than Columbus himself.

Beyond the press coverage, at the formal dedication itself, this celebration of the United States was also evident: the speakers were all Americans.⁶⁴ While foreign diplomats were invited to the dedication, they were only a part of it, surrounded by members of the American government, military, and civic societies. On the day of the dedication, the distinguished guests were escorted from the Auditorium Hotel to the fairgrounds in Jackson Park in a formal procession. Of the 31 separate groups that were a part of that procession, "The diplomatic Corp." were ninth in line, behind the executive branch of the US government. President Benjamin Harrison and the first lady were not in attendance because she was ill at the time, but other dignitaries, including most of the President's cabinet, and the heads of the commission of the World's Fair were present.⁶⁵ "Commissioners of foreign governments to the World's Columbian Exposition" and "Consuls from foreign governments" were listed as numbers 22 and 23 in line, behind members of the Supreme Court, all branches of the military, members of Congress, former President Rutherford B. Hayes, and governors and their staff from various US states.⁶⁶ As Litwicky states, these events and the "exposition grounds were closed to the public on the day of

⁶⁴ "At the Formal Dedication: Impressive Scene in the Big Building on the Grounds" *The New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1892, 9.

⁶⁵ "The Chicago Celebration" *The New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1892, 4.

⁶⁶ "Program for Dedication Week," *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 16, 1892, 12.

the dedication, and the admittance to the ceremonies was by invitation only. Various receptions and dinners welcoming distinguished visitors were likewise off limits to most Chicagoans.”⁶⁷ This part of the World’s Fair, the event that celebrated the “inauguration of the people’s age,” was thus largely closed off to the people. Being that many Chicagoans were not actually the model citizens the elites wanted to present them as, the illusion of law and order was best kept intact with “the people” at a distance.

The civic parade, which took place on Oct. 20, a day before the formal dedication was the only part of the celebration of which “the people” were actually a part. “The line of march included every race, nationality and creed in Chicago.”⁶⁸ The fact that the parade was made up of different races who *lived in Chicago* was an important point, one that the *New York Times* specifically pointed out as well.⁶⁹ This was because, as Litwicky stated, “the committee carefully orchestrated the parade to present its message of Americanization . . . In the Chicago depicted in the civic parade, immigrants were in the process of exchanging their native cultures for an American one.” Among the marchers were Italians, Poles, and Swedes. There were both Native Americans and African Americans who marched as examples of model citizens. And though there was “a dizzying array of ethnic colors and costumes, the red, white, and blue reigned supreme.”⁷⁰ While the parade was advertised as a display of diversity, it was organized as a display of assimilation.

While the Chicago elite behind the World’s Fair had the same goal of assimilation as the Progressives, Balch, Upham, and Bellamy, they did not share their desire to wait for those they

⁶⁷ Litwicky, *America’s Public Holidays*, 166.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “Chicago Celebration,” *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1892, 4.

⁷⁰ Litwicky, *America’s Public Holidays*, 167.

deemed “unamerican” to incorporate into the nation on their own terms. They pushed the illusion of assimilation in Chicago even when (or perhaps really because) that was not the case in reality. The city was still divided. Indeed, labor organizations did not march in the parade due to “the board of directors deafness to demands for fair wages and an eight-hour day for the laborers building the exposition.”⁷¹ For those who did march, they didn’t feel as if they were being assimilated because they still wore their native outfits and, in the case of African Americans, felt that by being a part of the parade it was an acknowledgement that they were a part of America on their own terms.⁷² The civic parade thus housed two different perceptions of what was happening to these “new Americans.” For the native-born American, they perceived the new Americans as assimilating to the traditional, American way of life, in which competing ethnic, racial and class identities were sublimated to disciplined expressions of loyalty to the United States. For the immigrants, they perceived their adopted home of America as reshaping itself to include them and their culture as well in one of its most important public celebrations.

The Nationwide Pledge: Celebrations of and Resistance to Patriotic Education.

It was this dichotomy that the Pledge of Allegiance became a part of when Upham connected the nationwide pledge to the World’s Fair dedication. The nationwide recitation of the pledge was clearly a success in that a variant of Bellamy’s version is still said in classrooms today. However, even after that very first nationwide pledge in 1892, there were dissenters who refused to have their children participate in such recitations, much like the laborers who refused to march in the civic parade. When native-born Americans were confronted with this evidence

⁷¹ Litwicky, *America’s Public Holidays*, 168.

⁷² *Ibid*, 167.

that people were not assimilating to their definition of Americanism, they became skeptical, not of the Pledge of Allegiance, but of those who refused to say it. In this way, it became less of a tool to turn young Americans into patriots, and more of a litmus test to determine how patriotic they were already.

During the nationwide event, an “estimated twelve million students recited the Pledge on Columbus Day, 1892.”⁷³ It took place in schools across the country. Many schools followed the program as prescribed by Upham and Bellamy, though not every school’s ceremony looked exactly the same.⁷⁴ In Chicago, for example, the celebration was pushed up to October 19, so as not to interfere with the dedication ceremony. Other than that, any changes they made “were in the way of elaboration rather than elimination,” according to the *Chicago Tribune*. In its reportage the *Tribune* showcased how each “gayly and patriotically decorated” schoolhouse in the city celebrated the event. It printed, in its entirety, the first aspect of the ceremony: the reading of President Harrison’s proclamation, “recommending to the people the observance in all their localities of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America, Oct. 21, 1892, by public demonstration and by suitable exercises in their schools and other places of assembly.” The paper then described the honored role the Civil War veterans played raising the flag itself and calling out “three cheers for Old Glory!” And it published Bellamy’s pledge in its entirety, along with songs and odes, and whatever differences in details of celebration existed among the various schools in Chicago.⁷⁵

⁷³ Smith, “Patriotism, Pledging Allegiance, and Public Schools,” 50.

⁷⁴ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 19-21.

⁷⁵ “Exercises in School: Young America Does Honor to the Memory of Columbus.” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct. 20, 1892, 9.

New York City, like Chicago, did not hold its event on October 21. Instead, the city held a three-day long celebration beginning Monday, October 10 and culminating on October 12. October 12 was in fact the date that *Youth's Companion* had been advertising for the celebration, as recently as in their May 26, 1892 issue.⁷⁶ The date was changed by Congress, however, after Bellamy lobbied to have the anniversary turned into an official holiday, because it had calculated that the 21st was the true date that Columbus discovered the Americas, “correcting for changes in calendars.”⁷⁷ But the organizers in New York stuck with the earlier date. The celebrations in the city consisted of three days of parades, with the first day featuring a parade of 25,000 schoolboys, marching to the Star-Spangled Banner.⁷⁸

The highlight was on the third day however, with a parade with 51,000 marchers, mostly made up uniformed federal and state troops from in and around New York. The parade was indeed patriotic, and that patriotism was directly linked to the military. As in Chicago, immigrants were a part of these parades, but all were relegated to the very rear of the processions. It began on Broadway and Washington street and travelled uptown to 59th street where the statue of Columbus at what is now called Columbus Circle was to be unveiled. Despite the distance, the streets and avenues were so overrun with parade watchers that it was still impossible for everyone who came to see the parade to actually get close enough to get a good view. It was, at the time, the largest parade ever held in New York, with just over 5,000 more marchers than the previous record holder, the centennial of Washington's election in 1889.⁷⁹ While New York City was richly decorated, and the mood was no doubt festive, the message of

⁷⁶ “Is Your School to Celebrate?” *The Youth's Companion* 65, May 26, 1892, 269.

⁷⁷ Ellis, *To the Flag*, 21.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “The Climax of the Week: All Past Parade Records Sent to the Rear,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 13, 1892, 9.

patriotism in schools was utterly lost because of the time lag between the city-wide parades and the in-school recitation of the pledge. By the time schools followed Bellamy's program on the 21st of October, the excitement for Columbus celebrations had fizzled out. Unlike the exciting, detailed review of the event in the *Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times* entitled its article "Interesting Exercises Held in the Public Schools" and devoted only part of a page nine column to it.⁸⁰

Clearly the life of Columbus, the adventurer, and the excitement of a big flashy parade were far more appealing to citizens of New York who came out in record numbers to march in and watch the processions from October 10 – 12 than the exercises for teaching children patriotism in schools. Though the school flag ceremony did not win as much attention among New Yorkers as it had among those in Chicago, it would have fallen on the Columbus holiday, for which Bellamy had pushed so hard to bring about the national unity he and other self-appointed patriotic educators sought. But like the Chicago's World's Fair, which had been appropriated for this assimilative agenda but tracked differently among different groups in the windy city, Columbus held different meanings for the different facets of New York society.

For native born Americans, Columbus was adopted as a founding father, meant to be a symbol, just like the flag, that "could marry intellectual citizenship and the emotional patriotism" to inspire blind allegiance to the country, as they believed him to be the original founder of the Americas.⁸¹ For the immigrants coming from Europe, their own journey was reflected in the journey of Columbus, particularly for Italians, because Columbus was not a founding father of the United States of America. Columbus was an Italian who sailed to the Americas just like the

⁸⁰ "In This City: Interesting Exercises Held in the Public Schools," *The New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1892, 9.

⁸¹ Litwicky, *America's Public Holidays*, 167.

many immigrants who celebrated Columbus Day. Once again, a single event that one group intended to advance assimilation actually housed different stories for different groups.

Bellamy clearly saw this multivalent nature of the event as a disappointment. On the evening of the nationwide pledge, Bellamy delivered a speech in his hometown of Malden, Massachusetts, where he was primarily concerned with displacing anything other than a preemptory acknowledgement of Columbus's 'discovery' of America. He felt that the true honor belonged to the English and Dutch settlers of the colonies. And, with his full nativist prejudice on display, "he directed his audience to imagine 'the fate of this continent if the old thirteen colonies have been Spanish colonies or Portuguese colonies, instead of British colonies ... then this continent would have wallowed on in the dirty ignorance and superstition and barbarism which have characterized all the colonies of Spain.'"⁸² Perhaps Bellamy and Upham's goal of using the pledge to teach traditional American values wouldn't have been lost in the two cities with the highest immigrant populations had Upham and Bellamy not hitched their celebration to a holiday commemorating a man who more closely resembled the immigrants these self-appointed patriotic educators were trying to assimilate than the native-born American people they believed were superior.

Alternative interpretations of the patriotic events around the nationwide pledge in New York and Chicago were just one way that the assimilationist agendas of Upham, Bellamy and the others did not fully succeed. The Pledge itself caused division among different groups of native-born Americans as well. In Salina, Kansas, *The Saline County Journal* described their town's version of the flag raising and pledge recitation, which had been designed in a military style. "Soon the school children came in marching order," with the total number who participated

⁸² Keirle, *American Periodicals*, 43.

“near 2,500.” After the flag was raised “the throngs of children saluted the flag in military style” as they recited Bellamy’s Pledge.⁸³ But the town’s first interaction with the Pledge was not without controversy. In another article, the paper called the demonstration “a very appropriate and proper thing to do on such an occasion. And yet there were those in this fair city of Salina who forbade their children pledging their allegiance to the flag of their country.”⁸⁴

The perpetrators were members of the People’s Party, the third party started by southern and western farmers who felt forgotten by a nation wrapped up in the second industrial age. They were determined “to redeem from government what seemed lost to monopoly heightened year by year.”⁸⁵ They refused to let their children pledge allegiance to a nation they felt had been taken over by corporate interests. To the law-and-order abiding citizens of Salina, the Populists were “unworthy of being called a citizen of this great republic” because they would not allow their children to participate in the flag raising and salute.⁸⁶ Once again, the meaning behind the Pledge was connected by those who accepted it, as well as by those who rejected it, to their own interpretation of America. Those who did not pledge were deemed traitors by those who believed that demonstrations of loyalty were essential to being American. For the Populists, they abstained from participating because they saw America as it was at that moment, a center for consumerism where corporations had the government in their pockets. Upham may have wanted people to pledge allegiance to America as it once was, and Bellamy wanted people to pledge

⁸³ “It Was the 400th Anniversary” *The Saline County Journal*, Oct. 27 1892, 4.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84027670/1892-10-27/ed-1/>, (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁸⁴ “Reaping the Whirlwind” *The Saline County Journal*, Oct. 27 1892, 2.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84027670/1892-10-27/ed-1/> (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁸⁵ John Higham, “The Nationalist Nineties” in *Strangers in the Land Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, E-book (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002),69
<https://hdl-handle-net.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/2027/heb.00398> (accessed 26 Feb 2021).

⁸⁶ “Reaping the Whirlwind” *The Saline County Journal*, Oct. 27 1892, 2.

allegiance to what America could become, but as the Populists saw it, they were pledging allegiance to the America of 1892, and that was what something the Populists would not do.

Conclusion:

Despite these tensions and divisions, the nationwide Pledge in 1892 was still heralded by its creators as a success. In the sense that it brought communities together in celebration and sold a lot of flags for schoolhouses, it was a success. In the sense that it Americanized immigrants and turned people away from the distractions of consumerism to rediscover the values of shared patriotism, it was an absolute failure. Balch, Upham, and Bellamy all displayed what was a clear prejudice against the new immigrants. While trying to assimilate new populations with a salute to a symbol that held great importance to them as children was perhaps a sincerely felt and noble idea, it did absolutely nothing to address the very real crises that the United States was facing at the time.

The nation itself was in deep disarray. In the summer preceding the nationwide pledge, “the governors of at least five states called out the National Guard ... on occasions of industrial violence.”⁸⁷ Still, the government sided against the laborers, who were condemned as anarchists for fighting for fair wages. Instead of immigrants becoming more American in the years following the first pledge of Allegiance, America became more anti-immigrant. In fact, it was an era that John Higham named “The Nationalist Nineties.”⁸⁸ Immigrants came to America and were segregated into slums, where they were overcharged to live in tenements ran by greedy landlords who did nothing to make them habitable. These vile living conditions, which came to

⁸⁷ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 69.

⁸⁸ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 68.

light through Jacob Riis' expose, were only made worse by how tightly packed these immigrants were crammed into these small apartments, turning them into epicenter of disease. Riis determined one area of the lower Manhattan tenements had a population of "three hundred and thirty thousand per square mile"⁸⁹ living in building between five and seven stories. Even with Riis' expose out, people still blamed the immigrants over the landlords because of the same prejudices shared by Balch and Bellamy. Instead of giving help to the immigrants or of supporting an immigrant policy that would determine how the nation would deal with immigrants once they arrived, these self-appointed patriotic educators told the newcomers to swear fealty to a flag that meant nothing to them. Many Americans during late nineties built on the prejudices that lurked behind Balch's, Upham's, Bellamy's and the Chicago elites' assimilationist agendas to fuel a time of intense xenophobia and calls for policy to limit immigration altogether.⁹⁰

The Pledge of Allegiance would remain popular as way to promote nationalism among native-born citizens. In the time since, The Pledge would ride waves of popularity during wartime. The Spanish American War led to the first legislation making saying the pledge compulsory.⁹¹ The Red Scare led to the replacement of the phrase "my flag" with "the flag of the United States of America," just so immigrant children couldn't secretly swear fealty to their home country's flag.⁹² The words "under God," not added until the year 1950, are still a source of controversy in the 21st century.⁹³ All of this was done to attempt to remove the abstraction from the symbol of the US flag, and further solidify what the flag is supposed to mean, and to

⁸⁹ Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 129.

⁹⁰ Higham, "Origins of Immigration Restriction," 82.

⁹¹ Smith, "Patriotism, Pledging Allegiance, and Public Schools," 50.

⁹² *Ibid*, 50-51.

⁹³ Richard J. Ellis, *Fresh Air*.

ensure people are pledging allegiance to what those in power want them to pledge allegiance to: law and order, democracy, capitalism, and Christianity. This is a nation of differences, with different points of view, and different people who love America for different reasons, and the flag should represent all of those things for all of those people. Unfortunately, from the start, the Pledge was part of a narrow assimilationist agenda with specific ideals that took away people's ability to truly make it, as Bellamy originally wrote it, "my flag."

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