

# Pledge allegiance in public school classrooms



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There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the recitation of the pledge of allegiance in public school classrooms. Most of controversy revolves around the use of the phrase " under God. " It was not until June 14, 1954 however that this highly contested phrase was inserted. The original tenor of the pledge of allegiance which was created by Francis Bellamy on September 7, 1892 read as follows: I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The problem with the insertion of the phrase " under God" is that it is supposed to present a conflict with the constitutional prohibition on the establishment clause. It is claimed by several detractors that by using the phrase " under God" and making it mandatory for the pledge to be recited in public school classrooms, the United States is signifying its preference for the Christian religion which is the only religion that uses the word God prominently. The historical antecedents for the insertion of such as phrase, which was inspired by the sermon given by the Rev. George M. Docherty, have also given the opposition more reason to believe that the phrase was indeed a violation of the establishment clause.

There have been recent court rulings such as the 2006 case *Frazier v. Alexandre*, No. 05-81142 (S. D. Fla. May 31, 2006) where it was ruled that " a 1942 state law requiring students to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance violates the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the U. S. Constitution, even though the law allows students to opt out, because they can only do so with written parental permission and are still required to stand during the recitation.

Cameron Frazier, a student at Boynton Beach High School, was removed from algebra class after he refused to follow his teacher's instructions to recite the Pledge or stand during recitation. " The essence of this issue is whether or not the insertion of the phrase " under God" constitutes a violation of the establishment clause. The problem is that the clause " under God" and its historical antecedent have a tendency to show that it may actually have been inspired by some religious denomination thus leading to all this controversy.

It must be remembered however that the use of the word God is not limited to pledge of allegiance but is also prominently displayed on the one dollar bill and has been there for a very long time already. It cannot therefore be argued that the recitation of the pledge of allegiance is a clear violation of the establishment clause when even the humble dollar bill has the sign " in God we trust" written on it. If it is to be argued that the phrase " under God" is a violation of the establishment clause then so must the dollar bill be struck down as a violation.

Yet time and again the almighty dollar has prevailed. The reason for this is because such a declaration is not an endorsement of a single religion, which is exactly what the establishment clause prohibits, but rather it is a declaration by the American people of their belief in a superior being. The God that is mentioned is not a God of a single religion but more of a symbolic God; a higher power who has kept America strong and given the forefathers the strength to move on and build the foundations for a great country.

The pledge of allegiance is exactly just that, a pledge of allegiance to the American flag and all that it stands for. A single word or phrase isolated and taken out of context does much to remove the original intent from it. As one of the America's most honored secular symbols, the pledge of allegiance is viewed by many in the same light as the National Anthem. This historical and cultural significance is what makes America the great nation that it is. The continued declaration of this pledge has done little to prevent the influx of immigrants into America.

In fact, the immigrants themselves, regardless of creed, race or religion, proudly remember the day when they are able to proudly recite that pledge because it is a symbol of everything that America stands for. It is not a prayer to God but rather it is an oath to America and to the forefathers. Reciting the pledge of allegiance in public school classrooms does not further the cause of any single religion. Instead, it serves to show the rest of the world the pride that Americans have for their great nation. It shows unity. It shows strength. It shows the American way.