What Is America?

The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an expression of loyalty to the federal flag and the republic of the United States of America, originally composed by Francis Bellamy in 1892 and formally adopted by Congress as the pledge in 1942. The Pledge has been modified four times since its composition (Wikipedia).

Bellamy's original Pledge 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.

Francis Bellamy - The word "to" was inserted between "...my Flag and" and "the Republic" in October 1892 (ushistory.org).

"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."

With a current population of 316,599,151 as of September 3, 2013 in the United States (US Census), how can we all pledge our allegiance to anything? In 1892 Francis Bellamy thought we could. Granted the population was much smaller then, but we were all still individual Americans. In recent years, "Under God..." has been added and removed among great controversy. But, the Pledge remained essentially the same. Many changes have also happened to the way in which it has been said. First by members of Congress for the celebration of Columbus Day, then by school children, then by members of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal organization.

The United States Census breaks our population into four separate categories and then proceeds to divide it into forty-five subcategories. With all of this breaking how do we become reunited? That question faced Reverend Bellamy in 1892. As he chose the words of our Pledge he envisioned, as he would later write, schoolchildren across America uniting with these words. He also had visions of adults doing the same at any public gathering. Through the years the Pledge has been a symbol of uniting and dissent. The early salute consisted of raising one's right hand into the air toward the flag with the palm down and ending with the palm up, the Bellamy Salute. This was discontinued in 1942 because it closely resembled the Nazi salute (Leeperson).

Today children are no longer required to repeat the Pledge of Allegiance. Only in five states (Hawaii, Iowa, Oklahoma, Vermont and Wyoming) is there not time set aside for the recitation of the Pledge (Goss).
However in the states where time is allotted, it is purely voluntary. So, does this unite our children? Do they take time to examine the words they are saying? Or, is it just a fifteen second drill they do to keep teacher happy? Rote words can in fact put them into the mind on a subconscious level making the words seem to affect judgment but it can also become a burden of personal duty and obligation.

How then to unite the peoples of our nation. We must all first speak the same language. No, not a tongue. Our words must have common definitions. Some of these most important words are found in the Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, which among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Wikipedia).

What is the United States of America? Webster defines united as:
1: made one: combined
2: relating to or produced by joint action <a united effort>
3: being in agreement: harmonious <a united family> (Webster).

United by a common cause. States are not just a piece of land, it can be a state of mind, a state of being; peace, strife or condition. Are we, the United States of America, united by “Life, Liberty and The Pursuit of Happiness,” these three states? Look at my examination of this with me.

“Life” The mere existence of a beating heart, the consumption of oxygen and brain activity. Also, foremost a state of being. The chance to live here or there, in honesty or crime, to be single or together with another in community or home. To live or die. These are just some of the states of “life” open to every American.

The state of “Liberty” is not just the ability to come and go as we choose. Rather it is the freedom to make that choice. Yes, we all have the liberty to be poor or impoverished, to be wise or foolish, to choose educated or ignorant. Liberty, however, is not free of cost. Each choice that comes with liberty has a price, some higher some lower but all carry possible permanent commitment. The choices of jail, death or freedom. The choice of work or sloth, joy or tears, success or failure. But, as Americans we have the right, no, the obligation to make those choices. Sometimes we can reflect on the impact to others, sometimes to only ourselves.

“The Pursuit of Happiness” as originally penned by Thomas Jefferson meant the ownership of private property. The ability to grow one’s own food and build one’s own house (Wikipedia). Since America as moved from being an agrarian society these pursuits have moved away from the earth into a more urban set of essentials. We now pursue things, stuff, even to the
point of junk. But, we have the right to pursue these, to our betterment or destruction. It is our guaranteed right, as Americans.

Are we united? Are we united in our states or are we just occupying the same piece of real estate, clawing and fighting for beach or mountaintop? During our class sessions I have come to ask myself these questions, about my world, my race (human) my country and more importantly myself. I am doing well, not the best that is possible but open to improvement. “Ethically” speaking, I can be better, more patient, increasingly kind and deeper thinking.

The human condition is not irreparable; it is bent but not shattered. It is up to each person to do a little better. As Americans, it is up to us to say our Pledge of Allegiance once in a while, just to ourselves and listen to, “…one nation, indivisible. With liberty and justice for all…” And, to live those words, daily and utmost, united.

The main issues I see with uniting Americans with the Pledge of Allegiance are "....under God..." and the language we have in common. Schools do not teach children to understand the meaning of words as much as encourage just rote memorization of them. How many first graders know the meaning of allegiance or even pledge. Many adults do not know the meaning of those words. Solution: better the education system. A restoration to the educational values that gave us so many brilliant minds of the past, minds that understood the English language, mathematics and our own history. On the "...under God..." part, we all need to step back for a minute and examine just what God means. Again, words. God as used in the pledge is acknowledging that something exists that is greater than any of us individually, something that we feel worthy of being united under. This is not just the Muslim God, the Judeo-Christian God or even the Mother Earth that the Pagan worships and observes but rather a collection of all of those. Our national prayer is, our Declaration of Independence to show our spirit of rebellion and our Constitution that shows our spirit of cooperation. The simple words that sum these up are found in the "Pledge of Allegiance." Keep the pledge in schools; leave the words as they are and most important to unite our great nation...teach children the meaning of the language they speak every day. Teach them that diversity is nice but unity is more important than segregation because, isn't that what diversity really is?
Bibliography


