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# History of the Pledge

The pledge was written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the Americas. President Benjamin Harrison proclaimed Oct. 21st — the original Columbus Day — a national holiday, and designated schools to be the main sites of celebration. Why Columbus? Because he symbolized America's supposed pioneer spirit and his voyage had made possible 400 years of "progress and freedom."

The original "Pledge to the Flag" was included in "The Official Programme for the National Columbian Public School Celebration of October 21, 1892." On that day, with increasing numbers of eastern and southern European immigrants entering the United States, an estimated 10 million children first recited the pledge.

Children were instructed to stand hands

to the side, to face the flag, and then to give the flag a military salute with "right hand lifted, palm downward, to a line with the forehead and close to it."

Standing thus, the Official Programme tells students to "all repeat together, slowly, 'I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands; one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.' At the words, 'to my Flag,' the right hand is extended gracefully, palm upward, toward the Flag, and remains in this gesture till the end of the affirmation; whereupon all hands immediately drop to the side."

Students were then to declare: "One Country! One Language! One Flag!" Presumably, the "One Language!" was English.

The arm-extended flag salute was the norm in American schools until 1942, when the similarity with the fascist salute

became uncomfortable. The hand-over-heart salute was then introduced.

The words "under God" do not appear in the original Pledge. They were added during the Eisenhower administration in 1954 at the height of anti-communist hysteria. ■

*The above is condensed from a longer article that appeared in **Rethinking Schools**, Vol 13, No. 3, Spring 1999. For the complete text go to [www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11).*