

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

March 26, 2018

The Pledge of Allegiance

"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."

Where did it come from? It was written by Francis Bellamy in 1892 and was recited on October 21, 1892 (Columbus Day) to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus to North America. It was first printed in a magazine called The Youth's Companion in September 1892. It was modified slightly in 1923-24 and "under God" was added in 1954. The original means of saluting the flag was a stiff-arm salute - identical to the Nazi salute except the palm of the hand was face-up instead of face-down.

In 1940, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the mandatory requirement of saluting the flag in schools. However, in 1943, the Court reversed itself and held that the very freedoms for which our flag stands allows people to refuse to salute the flag or recite the Pledge.

It seems to me to be a contradiction. People exercise their right to refuse to pledge allegiance to the government which gives them the right to refuse in the first place. The 1943 court case, West Virginia State Board of Education v Barnette, was filed by Jehovah Witnesses who argued that the flag was a graven image and saluting it constituted worshipping the flag in violation of their religious beliefs. IMHO, what a load of hogwash! Send the Jehovahs to Iran and let them see how much religious freedom they have in an Islamic Theocracy.

I commented in a previous blog that Muslim immigrants should be required to swear to uphold the U.S. Constitution and respect the separation of church and state. All Muslim-majority countries have Islam incorporated into their governing structure and many of them have theocracies - where religious leaders actually run the country. Jehovah Witnesses are no different than Muslims and should be required to put the protection of their religious freedom ahead of silly nuances. The flag is not a graven image and saluting it does not constitute worshipping the flag.

As much as I detest flag-waving zealots, I support the Pledge of Allegiance and the principles upon which our country is based (even if our government doesn't always live up to them). Children should recite the Pledge every day and should be taught the importance of our form of government.

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March 27, 2018

Censorship In Stanley

A few weeks ago I posted a blog critical of the KKK. One of my readers commented on that posting and Between the Bars sent that comment to me. When the comment arrived at Stanley, it was deemed to be gang-related and therefore contraband.

My blog and the comment were both critical of the KKK and white supremacists. There was no valid justification for denying me access to the reader's comments. But rather than fight the prison over such a petty issue, I sent the comment out in the mail. Read the blog and comment for yourself.

This relates back to a prison blog about the only slavery still legal in America. If prison officials were not allowed to treat us as slaves, they could not have denied me access to the comment under the pretext of security. In fact, if I enjoyed the same level of constitutional protections as free world citizens, they would not have even tried.

Fortunately, I was able to speak to the person I sent the prohibited comment to and she told me what it said.