



Rev. Al Sharpton Invokes Pledge of Allegiance, Sans 'Under God,' In New 'Lean Forward' Spot

By Ken Shepherd February 5, 2013

Rev. AL SHARPTON, Baptist minister and MSNBC host: We must have a renewed fight for many of the things we fought for. Because voting rights, and women's rights, and the rights of people against discrimination, whether they're African-American, Latino, lesbian and [sic] gay, must be protected, until we have a nation that is really living up to the creed of one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Not all of one kind. But all.

In fairness, and for historical context, the Pledge of Allegiance was originally drafted by a socialist and the original iteration did not include the term "under God," although the author was, like Sharpton, a Baptist minister.

Gene Healy of the libertarian-oriented Cato Institute noted its history in a November 2003 piece:

It's probably too much to ask politicians to reflect a little before they lunge for a political hot-button issue. But any conservatives so inclined should think about what they're defending. What's so conservative about the Pledge?

Very little, as it turns out. From its inception, in 1892, the Pledge has been a slavish ritual of devotion to the state, wholly inappropriate for a free people. It was written by Francis Bellamy, a Christian Socialist pushed out of his post as a Baptist minister for delivering pulpit-pounding sermons on such topics as "Jesus the Socialist." Bellamy was devoted to the ideas of his more-famous cousin Edward Bellamy, author of the 1888 utopian novel *Looking Backward*. *Looking Backward* describes the future United States as a regimented worker's paradise where everyone has equal incomes, and men are drafted into the country's "industrial army" at the age of 21, serving in the jobs assigned them by the state. Bellamy's novel was extremely popular, selling more copies than other any 19th century American novel except *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Bellamy's book inspired a movement of "Nationalist Clubs," whose members campaigned for a government takeover of the economy. A few years before he wrote the Pledge of Allegiance, Francis Bellamy became a founding member of Boston's first Nationalist Club.

After leaving the pulpit, Francis Bellamy decided to advance his authoritarian ideas through the public schools. Bellamy wrote the Pledge of Allegiance for *Youth's Companion*, a popular children's magazine. With the aid of the National Education Association, Bellamy and the editors of *Youth's Companion* got the Pledge adopted as part of the National Public School Celebration on Columbus Day 1892.

Bellamy's recommended ritual for honoring the flag had students all but goosestepping their way through the Pledge: "At a signal from the Principal the pupils, in ordered ranks, hands to the side, face the Flag. Another signal is given; every pupil gives the Flag the military salute—right hand lifted, palm downward, to a line with the forehead and close to it... At the words, 'to my Flag,' the right hand is extended gracefully, palm upward, towards the Flag, and remains in this gesture till the end of the affirmation; whereupon all hands immediately drop to the side." After the rise of Nazism, this form of salute was thought to be in poor taste, to say the least, and replaced with today's hand-on-heart gesture.

One can disagree with Healy's conclusion that the Pledge of Allegiance is unconservative, of course, but its genesis in the mind of a left-winger is undeniable.