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Humanities

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### Cohesion vs Criticality: Nationalism in Public Schools

In the modern day, allowing students to form their own conclusions is more valuable to creating a healthy society than the benefits of bonding from shared and imposed value systems. One controversy where these value systems clash is the forced, or pressured, recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in American public schools. The pro-pledge side argues that the pledge of allegiance creates camaraderie and social cohesion amongst a population with an otherwise diverse set of values. However, the mass introduction of nationalism and monotheism to students through the pledge not only divides them for an increasingly unnecessary goal, but also hinders the development of their ability to form their own conclusions, a necessary skill to develop before adulthood.

The pledge of allegiance exploits students' impressionability to push political agendas, dividing students and hindering logical thinking. Modern democracies thrive when citizens are trained to be open-minded and critical. As the world moves away from the factories of the industrial revolution and into an era of innovation, companies are increasingly looking for critical thinking skills in

employees. One way schools train these important skills is through encouraging students to question the world around them, an approach mutually exclusive to young students' recitation of a vow largely incomprehensible to them. It is argued by parents that "[the pledge of allegiance] fosters a sense of national community and civic responsibility from a young age" (Kimerer), and that the bonding created by the pledge is enough to justify the means. Even this, though, is incorrect. The pledge fails spectacularly at its sole mission of creating a sense of national community. Despite referring to the nation as 'indivisible', it contradicts itself by dividing the nation just one clause earlier: "... one nation, *under god*, indivisible...." In his majority opinion, Justice Robert Jackson wrote "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein" (Paul). Introducing monotheistic faith as a prerequisite for being included into the nation and 'prescribing' it to the public not only goes against our country's founding values, but also alienates both atheists and polytheists from the nation, groups who make up over a quarter of the United States population. Instead, if parents want monotheistic and nationalistic values taught to their children, it should be taught at home. As one teacher points out, "[parents] are in the best position ... to instill the virtues of education, patriotism, hard work and family onto our kids"(Lee). Leaving the teaching of such values serves to prevent alienation in public schools and allows for some students to form their own conclusions.

In today's diverse America, the need for rigid social cohesion through forced rituals such as the Pledge of Allegiance has decreased, especially as the percentage of immigrants declines. The inventor of the pledge, Francis Bellamy, called the pledge a way to separate "true Americanism" from the "races which we cannot assimilate without a lowering of our racial standard"(Petrella). Even with the generous interpretation that he's referring to differences in intrinsic cultural values, his argument is still no longer valid. In 1890, 1900, and 1910, the immigrant percentage of the US population was 14.8%, 13.6%, and 14.7% respectively, while in 1960, 1970, and 1980, the percentages were 5.4%, 4.7%, and 6.2% (Gibson). The United States is no longer the cultural melting pot it once was; its citizens now come from generations of established families. Therefore, the demand for assimilation, which may have justified such extreme measures in the past, has waned. Instead, fostering critical thinking and open-mindedness among students aligns better with the needs of modern society, where innovation, individuality, and the ability to question the status quo are far more valuable than conformity.

By removing the imposition of uniform nationalistic values, our school system can build a generation of independent thinkers capable of innovating in a complex and interconnected world. Allowing students the freedom to develop their own conclusions fosters a more inclusive, thoughtful, and ultimately more

united society, where diversity of thought is seen as a strength, rather than a weakness.

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## **BRAINSTORMING BELOW**

I want to write about the pledge of allegiance being recited in school because I have personal experience with it and generally disliked it during my time in public school.

Every public school in America plays the pledge of allegiance each morning. This ubiquity has attracted its fair share of controversy. This song has been argued to foster a sense of collectivism by some, while others argue that political and religious agenda shouldn't have a place in public schools.

Write an essay that develops a position on the recitation of the pledge of allegiance in American public schools.

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Paul, Pamela. "I Pledge Allegiance to ... My Conscience." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 16 Mar. 2023, [www.nytimes.com/2023/03/16/opinion/pledge-allegiance-south-carolina.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/16/opinion/pledge-allegiance-south-carolina.html).



Preliminary Thesis:

[Think about possibly mentioning pledge explicitly]

In the modern day, allowing students to form their own conclusions should be of higher importance than the benefits of the bonding that comes with shared value systems.



## Outline 1 (Better) :

In the modern day, allowing students to form their own conclusions is more valuable to creating a healthy society than the benefits of bonding from shared and imposed value systems. One controversy where these value systems clash is the forced, or pressured, recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in American public schools. The pro-pledge side argues that the pledge of allegiance creates camaraderie and social cohesion amongst a population with an otherwise diverse set of values. However, the introduction of nationalism and monotheism to students hinders the development of their ability to form their own conclusions.

**Keywords:** *healthy society, value systems, social cohesion, nationalism, monotheism*

Our democracy thrives when citizens are trained to be open-minded and critical. It can be argued that the pledge serves as a unifying ritual that creates social cohesion. [However, 'under god' divides people into monotheists and heretical infidels, ...] [Without open-mindedness, bad things happen]

A shared value system pushed onto students limits students' freedoms to explore their own morality and beliefs.

Conclusion: Freedoms vs tradition

## Outline 2 (Worse) :

In the modern day, allowing students to form their own conclusions is more valuable to creating a healthy society than the benefits of bonding from shared and imposed value systems. One long-standing tradition in American public schools is the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, a practice intended to instill a sense of national unity, though not without controversy. While the ritual is seen by many as valuable to creating social cohesion and patriotism, critics argue that it introduces dividing ideas such as nationalism and monotheism to students at their most impressionable, actually reducing social cohesion.

The pledge of allegiance was made in 1892 to promote inclusivity, with additions since, including the notable addition of the phrase 'under god' in 1954.

Supporters argue the pledge creates a shared sense of belonging, reinforcing commitment to the nation's ideals.

However, recitation of the pledge prevents independent thought, threatening our democracy, and actually ends up alienating those students who don't subscribe to Abrahamic religions.

[Possibly data on critical thinking? Not sure]

Outdated economically, factory vs innovation, (social) less immigrants, more cohesion, jobs without intent.

Conclusion, modern pertinence, legality, etc