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Mitt Romney's Favorite Socialists

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Many politicians ask their audiences to recite the Pledge of Allegiance at campaign rallies as a demonstration of their patriotism and love of country. Recently, Mitt Romney has taken this tradition a step further. At a campaign rally in Virginia two weeks ago, Romney reminisced about reciting the Pledge in his fourth grade class. Then he used each line of the Pledge to make a point about his own views -- about unifying the country, strengthening the military and the importance of keeping God in our public life -- and to criticize Obama for falling short in these areas. He's followed the same script at subsequent campaign events.

Perhaps Romney doesn't know the history of the Pledge. Would he be so eager to recite it if he knew that it was written by a socialist who was outraged by the nation's widening economic divide? Is Romney ignorant of the fact that the phrase "under God" was not part of the original Pledge? And is he aware that another one of his favorite campaign riffs, "America the Beautiful," was also [written by](#) a socialist, who was also a lesbian?

As the *New York Times* reported, Romney told the Virginia crowd that "The promises that were made in that pledge are promises I plan on keeping if I am president, and I've kept them so far in my life." He continued: "That pledge says 'under God.' I will not take 'God' out of the name of our platform. I will not take 'God' off our coins, and I will not take God out of my heart. We're a nation bestowed by God."

Working his way through the Pledge, Romney discussed the part that refers to the nation as "indivisible."

"I will not divide this nation," Romney pledged. "I will not apologize for America abroad, and I will not apologize for Americans here at home."

Romney argued that for the sake of liberty, the country "must have a military second to none, so strong no one would ever think of testing it." And that when it came to justice for all, "I don't think it's just to the next generation for us to pass on massive debts that we've amassed and pass on to them \$16 trillion in debt."

"We pledge allegiance to that flag, we believe in a nation under God, a nation indivisible, a nation united, a nation with justice and liberty for all," Romney summed up, "and for that to happen we're going to have to have a new president that will commit to getting America working again, that will commit to a strong military, that will commit to a nation under God that recognizes that we the American people were given our rights not by government but by God himself."

The Pledge of Allegiance was written by Francis Bellamy in 1892 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' discovery of America by promoting use of the flag in public schools.

Bellamy, who lived from 1855 to 1931, was a Baptist minister and a leading Christian socialist who was ousted from his Boston church, not far from Romney's current home in suburban Belmont, for his sermons depicting Jesus as a socialist and for his work among the poor in the Boston slums.

It was the Gilded Age, an era of major political and social conflict. Reformers were outraged by the widening gap between rich and poor, and the behavior of corporate robber barons who were exploiting workers, gouging consumers, and corrupting politics with their money. Workers were organizing unions. Farmers joined forces in the Populist movement to leash the power of banks, railroads and utility companies. Progressive reformers fought for child labor laws, against slum housing and in favor of women's suffrage. Radicals were gaining new converts.

In foreign affairs, Americans were battling over the nation's role in the world. America was beginning to act like an imperial power, justifying its expansion with a combination of white supremacy, manifest destiny and spreading democracy. At the time, nativist groups in the North and Midwest, as well as the South, were pushing for restrictions on immigrants -- Catholics, Jews and Asians -- deemed to be polluting Protestant America. In the South, the outcome of the Civil War still inflamed regional passions. Many Southerners, including Civil War veterans, swore allegiance to the Confederate flag.

Bellamy (cousin of Edward Bellamy, author of two best-selling radical books, *Looking Backward* and *Equality*) believed that unbridled capitalism, materialism and individualism betrayed America's promise. He hoped the Pledge of Allegiance would promote a different moral vision to counter the rampant greed he thought was undermining the nation.

Bellamy initially intended to use the phrase "liberty, fraternity and equality," but concluded that the radical rhetoric of the French Revolution wouldn't sit well with many Americans. So he coined the phrase, "one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all," intending it to express a more egalitarian vision of America, a secular patriotism to help unite a divided nation.

Bellamy penned the Pledge of Allegiance for *Youth's Companion*, a magazine for young people published in Boston with a

circulation of about 500,000. A few years earlier, the magazine had sponsored a largely successful campaign to sell American flags to public schools. In 1891 the magazine hired Bellamy to organize a public relations campaign to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's discovery of America by promoting use of the flag in public schools.

Bellamy gained the support of the National Education Association, along with President Benjamin Harrison and Congress, for a national ritual observance in the schools, and he wrote the Pledge of Allegiance as part of the program's flag salute ceremony.

Bellamy thought such an event would be a powerful expression on behalf of free public education. Moreover, he wanted all the schoolchildren of America to recite the pledge at the same moment. He hoped the pledge would promote a moral vision to counter the individualism embodied in capitalism and expressed in the climate of the Gilded Age.

In 1923, over the objections of the aging Bellamy, the National Flag Conference, led by the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution, changed the opening, "I pledge allegiance to my flag" to "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America." In 1954, at the height of the Cold War -- when many political leaders believed that the nation was threatened by godless communism -- the Knights of Columbia led a successful campaign to get Congress to add the words "under God."

Romney is also fond of singing "America the Beautiful" at campaign events. He must be proud of the fact that the words were written by another Boston area resident, Katharine Lee Bates.

Like Bellamy, however, Bates' love of her country, expressed in "America the Beautiful," was balanced by her anger at the misdeeds of its rulers. And, like Bellamy, she was a Christian socialist.

Bates was a professor of English at Wellesley College when she penned the poem in 1893 after visiting Pikes Peak in Colorado, from which she saw the Rocky Mountains in one direction and the Great Plains in the other. When she returned to her hotel room, she wrote a letter to friends, observing that "countries such as England failed because, while they may have been 'great,' they had not been 'good.'" She declared, "Unless we are willing to crown our greatness with goodness, and our bounty with brotherhood, our beloved America may go the same way."

"America the Beautiful" is both a declaration of Bates' patriotism and a protest against Gilded Age greed. It begins with the now well-known words,

"Oh, beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain;
For purple mountains' majesty above the fruited plain."

Then she pivots to protest:

"America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law! "
In another verse, she observed:

"America! America! God shed his grace on thee.
Till selfish gain no longer stain The banner of the free! "
She wasn't happy about America's political leaders, either, as reflected in this verse:

"America! America! God shed his grace on thee.
Till nobler men keep once again. Thy whiter jubilee!"
The poem's final words -- "and crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea" -- are an appeal for social justice rather than the pursuit of wealth.

"America the Beautiful" was published in 1895 and later set to music written by Samuel Ward, the organist at Grace Episcopal Church in Newark, New Jersey.

Bates was part of progressive reform circles in the Boston area, concerned about labor rights, urban slums and women's suffrage. For decades she lived with and loved her Wellesley colleague Katharine Coman, who authored "The History of Contract Labor in the Hawaiian Islands" and "The Economic History of the Far West."

Were Bates and Coman alive today, they would probably have taken advantage of Massachusetts' law allowing same-sex couples to marry - a law that Romney stridently opposes.

Next thing we know, Romney might be adding "This Land is Your Land" to his campaign stump speech. But before he does, someone should warn him that its author, Woody Guthrie, was a committed radical, and that this patriotic protest song includes a little-known stanza that criticizes the notion of private property.

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