Student Sample 2

A Denial of Rights

Since the creation of the Pledge of Allegiance in 1892, up until the past five years or so, it has been a deeply revered poem. Today the Pledge of Allegiance in conjunction with the flag is still said in most schools and some other forms of nationalistic pride, such as the national anthem are said as part of many athletic events. It can be said that the Pledge of Allegiance has unwillingly become a part of the daily lives of the children in this country. As citizens of this country, we are encouraged to speak against injustices in order to preserve its greatness. We are encouraged by the government to sign petitions to raise awareness for the plights that we may have with the law. This is one of the many rights granted to us by the governing body of this country. Through an analysis of the past and present, one could see that the true meaning behind Pledge is truly not something that this nation should be proud of, as it not only contradicts itself but represents ideals that may hinder this country's advancement.

This country lost 620,000 soldiers during the American Civil War from 1861- 1865. Following its devastation, it was the pride in one’s nation that motivated the people of America to rise from the ashes and become a better America, causing an uproar of movements meant to encourage the same pride in others. The medium in which people entrusted to properly portray their pride was the Flag of the United States. The 50 stars and 13 stripes of the flag waved from the roof of almost every building in the country, but New York City was especially noted for this. A handful of people felt that this was not enough and therefore started to perform ceremonies in schools in which the flag and the kids of the future was at the center of attention. The first of these ceremonies was held in the City College of New York, drawing the attention of Charles Homer (Ellis 5). Mr. Homer was an important member of the fraternal organization that was supported by and run by war veterans, GAR (loc.gov). Not only were these ceremonies meant to encourage the people of that time, but also to instill a sense of pride in children that would eventually pass on to their own children. This sudden burst of pride in public schools encouraged the GAR to enforce the behavior, leading them to begin a flag initiative. They partnered with the owners of the Youth Companion, a highly regarded family chronicle at the time, in order to get a flag waving from every public school institution in New York City. This wave continued and led to the idea of a celebration of “The Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Discovery of America by Columbus” (Ellis 8). The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 by the newest employee of the Youth Companion, Francis Bellamy, in collaboration with the owners of the Youth Companion magazine. Eventually, with the approval of the president, it became a part of daily school life for children across the nation. As language evolves into being more precise and clear in its meaning, some older forms of poetry, such as the Pledge, can no longer be interpreted the way in which it was a hundred years ago.

It is imperative to first begin by dissecting the pledge of allegiance to graciously come to an understanding of its meaning. After its many changes, from being 23 simply words to 31 words, it has come to be “a solemn oath of allegiance or fidelity to the U.S.” (dictionary.com Pledge of Allegiance). One could argue that the pledge is not an oath of loyalty to the government, but to the nation that we as its people have created and are in control of. As the creators of the government, therefore, the government is subject to us. However, this is not the case as perfectly demonstrated in our presidential elections. When the four-year cycle of our current president is up, many people of both the republican and democrat side will run to be the next president of the United States. After a few months of advertising themselves to us, “the people” get to vote on which person they feel is best fit to run the nation. However, after the votes are counted and numbers are in, it is the job of the electoral college to pick the “crème of the crop.” According to Los Angeles Time magazine, “The constitution does not specifically require electors to cast their votes according to the popular vote in their states…” (latimes.com). Since the power that someone in opposition would claim Americans have over the government is only meant to appease the crowds and give us a false pretense, it can be said then that the purpose of the pledge in to swear loyalty to a government that wishes to deceive its people.

“Liberty and Justice for All”, the ending and grand finale of the pledge. “Liberty and Justice for all”, the grounds on which the court systems of this country stand. “Liberty and Justice for all”, another false reality created by the government of this nation. Those last five words have remained consistent since the creation of the Pledge and are a part of its original version. Someone that sees nothing wrong with that statement could quite possible argue that the court system is fair in its organization to ensure that the court is as unbiased as possible. They could say that the most powerful court, the Supreme court, has a variety of nationalities to avoid any racial bias in the decisions. In reality, there have only been three non-white supreme court justices since its establishment in 1789 (Wikipedia.org). One can also argue their claim by going over the status and treatment of African Americans around the time that the Pledge was created. Slavery was legally abolished in 1865. The pledge was written only 27 years following the abolishment of slavery. As one could imagine the treatment of African Americans was not what it is today. Prevalent in the south were Black Codes and Jim Crow laws, both of which were meant to put restrictions on these now legally “free” people. Jim Crow laws were the laws that enforced segregation and did not end until 1954. At this point in time, everything was separate, but not equal which was the ruling of the Plessy V. Ferguson court case. It was in this case that segregation was declared to be legal. The accommodations of the African Americans were often of a lesser quality than those of the white people. In an effort to try to keep rebellions as a minimum, the government tried its best to limit the amount of education available in African American schools, leading them to intentionally underfund them (vahistorical.org). In this case, there truly was no justice because the source of justice itself was corrupt. The supreme court justices at this time used nothing but racism and bias to make conclusions and rulings, invalidating the argument that the supreme court makes and has made an effort to keep the panel fair.

As the pledge claims, we are all equal and under one God in this nation. Supporters of this addition to the pledge would say that it is harmless and simply is a tribute to the history of America’s religious history (thoughtco.com). Is it appropriate to pay respect to the religion on which this country is based? The people that established the first colonies were puritans. The puritans of Massachusetts were among the first to start practicing slavery (slate.com). The puritan church promoted kindness to all but considered the slaves to be property, therefore, said nothing about treating the slaves with kindness. Why would we want to honor a people that represent the past from which we are trying to advance? Supporters would also say that the statement “under God” is “inclusive of all Americans” (thoughtco.com). The Puritans were strictly Christian and did not truly offer religious freedom in their colonies. Their colonies promoted tolerance, but not freedom. Religious freedom is the right to choose a religion without interference by the government (dictionary.com freedom of religion). Religious tolerance is the allowance of a religion that is not generally accepted. Today America is known to be a melting pot of every nation and religion. This, therefore, means that our nation consists of more than just Christian citizens. America consists of almost every form of Christianity ranging from protestant to Jehovah’s witness as well as most of the non-Christian religions such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. According to the Pew Research Center, 70.6% of Americans are some form of Christian, 5.9% are non-Christian, 15.8% are other religions, and 1.5% are either unaffiliated with a religion, atheist, or agnostic (pewforum.org).

We can better understand the melting pot of America when we seek to understand the Bill of Rights, especially the 1st amendment. This amendment protects the freedom of speech, religion, press, assembly and the right to petition to the government. There have been many cases in which freedom of religion and nationalistic practice clash. A nationalistic person could argue that it is disrespectful to not acknowledge the country in the form a salutation and pledge. They would also likely say that being in this country and not complying with social customs of the country one lives in is hypocritical. One could then reply by bringing out that this country contains people that both love and hate it, but it is the job of our government to protect and enforce the rights of its citizens regardless of their personal opinions and life choices. In the supreme court case Barnette, it was ruled that a public school student could not be forced to recite the Pledge of Allegiance if it conflicted with their religion. However, the settling of this court case did not prevent a new jersey school from suspending five Black Muslim students for objecting to say the Pledge due to religious objection (Ellis 156). After some debate, the case was taken to the supreme court in which it was settled that the objection was indeed lawful and the students could not be penalized for it. As mentioned before, many people don’t believe in anything. This was the problem with one of the objections to the Pledge in a Queen high school. According to Ellis, the student objected to reciting the pledge because she was an atheist and also disagreed with the part of the pledge that claims the United States to be a land of liberty and justice for all (Ellis 157). Instead of reciting the flag, the student wished to either not be present or sit down upon hearing her classmates recite it. Her plea was denied by the principle of the school she attended and she was threatened with suspension if she failed to comply. This case simply set precedent to many like it to come in the future. The point being that many people have found the pledge to be deceitful and the opposite of what it claims to be.

In the efforts to spur parents to convince their children to recite the pledge, one could say that not reciting the pledge draws unwanted attention to the child and how possibly put them in danger for being isolated and bullied. However, this could be said for any situation. Would a parent convince their children to start smoking if they were being bullied for choosing not to do so? Would we tell our children not to voice their opinion on a matter for because of the fear of being isolated by their peers? The best people are those that are isolated by the general public for their strange and eccentric beliefs. It is in those people that the best discoveries are made. Consider Albert Einstein, for example, he was thought to be a crazy man that it until he started making monumental developments in science. Would anyone be willing to tell Einstein, knowing his excellence, that he should have sacrificed his Nobel prize for the sake of fitting in?

My rights have personally been infringed upon, during my attendance of a catholic middle school. Being a Christian but not a catholic, my beliefs were constantly under scrutiny by both my peers and my teachers. On the first day of school of my sixth grade year, my teacher took particular notice that I was not participating in the Pledge of Allegiance. She proceeded to remove me from class and question my actions. Upon telling her that I was a Jehovah’s witness, she stated that regardless of my beliefs I had to recite the pledge in unison with the rest of my classmates. As I continued to stand my ground, the teacher tried to get me into trouble with the principle by the middle of the year. The principle, however, was far more understanding of my situation and was appreciative of the strength of my faith under pressure. With his blessing, I continued to stand firm in my affirmation despite the ignorance of my teacher. It is people like my sixth grade teacher that need to come to terms with the fact that every citizen has the right to freedom of religion as well as freedom of speech, therefore, in both cases allowing the public to personally object to almost anything they see fit.

As the population of this country just continues to increase, its people need to make a decision on which is more important in order to prevent the same mistakes from happening. Should this country sacrifice the rights on which America takes pride or continue to think in a way which limits our horizons and causes more discrepancies within this nation? After reading this composition, one could either choose to continue to be blind to the real problems of this nation or to be the one that is continuously modifying their thinking in order to make America a better place.

Reflection paper

This argumentative essay has been a month long process in which we first constructed an annotated bibliography. In this bibliography we had to pick five sources pertaining to our topic and 1 of the five sources had to be a book. After being given the assignment, we had a class that specifically catered to research. We learned how to make use of the library catalog in a way that would save us time in searching for a book that directly related to our topic. We were also taught how to use the online databases that are available from all around the world, providing un-paralleled information, which satisfies the seventh course learning outcome. In the following class we each subjected our thesis statements to criticism by both our classmates and the professor. This exercise helped us each to gain the perspective of the reader and helped us to expand our audience and provide more background information, satisfying the fifth learning outcome. These sources would help us to create an outline for which we would then use to construct the expository essays. I then made use of a formal outline in which I used the rhetorical situation to guide me in how my paragraphs would be constructed, which satisfies the fourth course learning outcome. I listed the main idea of each paragraph along with the supporting details for the main idea. After completing the expository essay, we posted it online and had to edit those of our classmates which satisfies the second course learning outcome. All of these steps were then applied in the construction of the argumentative essay.

We were advised to construct an outline in the same manner in which we did the expository essay. I originally wanted to construct my paper strictly on disproving why the additions to the flag should not have been added. I was going to include the entire black history, which involved significant figure heads such as Martin Luther king, Rosa Park and Malcolm X. Most of the sources included in my annotated bibliography were regarding these topics. The sources included some of Martin Luther King’s writings from jail as well as personal accounts of people that faced the KKK as part of their daily lives. However, I felt that my paper would be too biased if I included information that strictly described wrongs done to African Americans over time. I also was considering the addition of the LGBTQ community in my paper as this would add an interesting twist on the direction of my paper. I would have used the denial of the rights of people that are a part of the LGBTQ community to prove why there is not justice for all, as they have fought and are still fighting for their deserved rights. However, I decided not to include this into my final paper because I felt that my paper would begin to lose its focus, being the Pledge of Allegiance.

My outline is centered around my stance. Since the Pledge of Allegiance is the representation of the false reality that the government is instilling in us, it is our choice given to us by the 1st amendment to recite it or not and nobody has the grounds on which to deny us that right. While constructing both the argumentative essay and the expository essay, I inserted some of the citations of the sources we found during the construction of our annotated bibliographies which made use of the third course learning outcome. Since the direction of my paper completely changed over time, I was forced to do more research and change a lot of the sources that I originally planned on using. The citations that I used are mainly dealing with background information regarding the history of the Pledge, racial laws, and counter claims to my statements. In this essay, I decided do indirectly include my exigence into my paper as the anecdote. My exigence is the life altering series of events that occurred during my sixth grade year while attending a Catholic Middle school. I was harassed by my teacher to recite the Pledge of Allegiance even though I described to her on multiple occasions that it is against my religion. Her lack of respect for my rights provided by the first amendment is what inspired the idea nada structure of this paper. The event described is only one of the many examples of persecution that I faced while in that school. However, that event is the most relevant to the purpose of this essay.

The genre of this essay is an argumentative essay because there are many people that fail to see the inconsistencies within the Pledge of Allegiance and our society. I felt that a different form of an essay would not have carried as much weight and I wouldn’t be able to prove and disprove any opinions. This genre on writing is imperative to convince people that the problem with the Pledge of Allegiance is greater than what it is perceived to be. The counter claims with which I used to develop my argument were where claims that I have either found online or claims that I have heard on a first-hand account. In the construction of my argumentative essay, I used my own anecdotes, the bill of rights, as well as the accounts of others to analyze and interpret the Pledge of Allegiance in order to reaffirm my stance as well as to broaden my audience, which satisfies the eighth course learning outcome. For example, I described the first amendment, and applied it to the anecdote provided in order to give the reader room to sympathize with the eleven-year-old Siarra. My original audience are those of us that are citizens of the United States, however, I have come to realize that people not native to this country would not be able to relate to the information being presented unless I expanded on it. Henceforth, my new audience became everyone that may or may not be native the states. The purpose of this essay is to awaken those ignorant to the threat that the pledge of allegiance poses. If the Pledge continues to instill its ideals into the minds of the future generations then this country will never evolve into its fullest potential. After completing this essay, I will then begin to work on the digital form of it, which will be in a power point, satisfying the sixth course learning outcome. This will change my medium from being print to digital. In going from print to digital the audience, and purpose will also change. The audience will expand and be able to reach various people. My purpose might now be to start a petition to change the Pledge of Allegiance; it might very well take a more active role in the problem rather than just discussing it.

Outline

1. Introduction
2. Pledge of allegiance history
   1. Civil war= increase in national pride
   2. 400th anniversary of discovery of America
   3. Francis Bellamy
3. Changes in the Pledge
   1. Original had 23 words
   2. Edited version has 31words
   3. Meaning of the pledge
   4. Counter claim- not loyalty to gov. but loyalty to nation
      1. Disproved in elections
      2. No real control over government
      3. Therefore, claim invalid
4. Liberty and Justice for all
   1. Counter claim- court system is fair and unbiased due to “variety of nationalities” in supreme court
      1. Only 3 non-white justices since its creation
      2. The court has always been unjust
         1. Evidence in the Jim Crow laws, black codes
         2. Plessy vs. Ferguson
         3. Lack of fund for black education- intentional
5. Under God
   1. Counter claim- “under God” addition is harmless and is s tribute to the country’s religious background
      1. Puritan religion was racist and hypocritical
   2. Counter claim- “under God” is inclusive of all religions
      1. Puritans were strictly Christians and tolerated, did not accept
   3. America today = many different religions therefore, not all one God
6. Bill of rights: 1st amendment
   * 1. Right to practice religion
     2. Right to freedom of speech
   1. Counter claim: disrespectful to not acknowledge the history of the country in which you live
      1. Weather you love or hate this country, your rights should be protected and acknowledged by others.
   2. Events in which rights were ignored
      1. Black Muslim student in new jersey
      2. Barnette case
      3. Student felt that this country is not the land of liberty and justice for all
7. Peer pressure
   1. Other children smoking= your child smoking?
   2. Other kids scared to voice opinion= your child scared to voice opinion
   3. Best people are people that stand out from crowd
      1. Einstein
8. Anecdote
   1. Catholic middle school
   2. Harassed by teacher
   3. Principle sided with me
   4. Violation of rights
9. Conclusion

Works Cited:

Agrawal, Nina. “All the Times in U.S. History That Members of the Electoral College Voted

Their Own Way.” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 20 Dec. 2016, beta.latimes.com/nation/la-na-faithless-electors-2016-story.html. Accessed 10 Nov. 2017.

“Beginnings of Black Education.” *Beginnings of Black Education | Virginia Historical Society*,

Virginia Historical Society, [www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/civil-rights-movement-virginia/beginnings-black](http://www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/civil-rights-movement-virginia/beginnings-black). Accessed 10 Nov. 2017.

Blanck, Emily. “Puritan Massachusetts Colonists Viewed Slaves as ‘Family.’ Were They?” *Slate Magazine*, The History of American Slavery, 3 June 2015, www.slate.com/articles/life/the\_history\_of\_american\_slavery/2015/06/the\_patronizing\_culture\_of\_family\_slavery\_in\_18th\_century\_massachusetts.html

Cline, Austin. “Defending and Justifying 'under God' in the Pledge.” *ThoughtCo*, 24 Mar. 2017,

[www.thoughtco.com/defending-and-justifying-pledge-of-allegiance-250587](http://www.thoughtco.com/defending-and-justifying-pledge-of-allegiance-250587). Accessed 10 Nov. 2017.

“Demographics of the Supreme Court of the United States.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation,

10 Nov. 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\_of\_the\_Supreme\_Court\_of\_the\_United\_States.

Ellis, Richard (Richard J.). *To the Flag : the Unlikely History of the Pledge of Allegiance*.

Lawrence, Lawrence : University Press of Kansas, 2005.

"Freedom of religion". *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition*. Houghton

Mifflin Company, 2005. 12 Nov. 2017. <Dictionary.com <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/freedom-of-religion>>. Accessed 10 Nov. 2017.

"Pledge of allegiance". *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 12 Nov. 2017.

<Dictionary.com <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/pledge-of-allegiance>>. Accessed 10 Nov. 2017.

“The Grand Army of the Republic and Kindred Societies.” *The Grand Army of the Republic and Kindred Societies (Main Reading Room, Library of Congress)*, Main Reading Room, www.loc.gov/rr/main/gar/garintro.html.

Wormald, Benjamin. “Religious Landscape Study.” *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public*

*Life Project*, 11 May 2015, www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.