

The American's Creed

I believe in the United States of America as a ¹ government of the people, by the people, for the people; ² whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed; ³ a democracy in a republic; ⁴ a sovereign nation of many sovereign states; ⁵ a perfect union, one and inseparable; ⁶ established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes. ⁷

I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it; ⁸ to support its constitution; ⁹ to obey its laws; ¹⁰ to respect its flag; and ¹¹ to defend it against all enemies. ¹²

The American's Creed was developed by William Tyler Page, clerk of the United States House of Representatives in 1917, in answer to a national contest for such a creed. He incorporated in a brief, clear statement the basic American traditions and ideals, as expressed by the founders of our country and by its leading statesmen and writers.

Key to the The American's Creed:, 1. Closing words of Preamble to the Constitution; 2. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; 3. Declaration of Independence; 4. James Madison in The Federalist, No. X; 5. Speech by Daniel Webster, Jan. 26, 1830; 6. Preamble to the Constitution; 7. Adapted from closing words of Declaration of Independence; 8. Speech by John Hancock; 9. United States Oath of Allegiance; 10. George Washington's Farewell Address; 11. War Department Circular, April 14, 1917; 12. Oath of Allegiance.

OUR DEMOCRACY

To you and me, America is the finest country in the world. But it is not just the land we love, it is also the kind of life for which America stands – our democracy.

It is your duty as an American to help keep that democracy alive. To do this, you must know the true meaning of America, you must believe in her form of government, you must be willing to do your part to keep America great.

The American's Creed sums up, in the words of great Americans, the things for which America stands. It points out your rights and privileges and your duties as an American citizen.

". . . I BELIEVE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA . . ."

The United States of America -that's the name of our country, given it by the men who founded it. United, the people of America have worked to give it its present high standards of living.

United, we can go on to even greater prosperity and happiness.

". . . AS A GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE . . ." Of, by, and for the people - not just some of them, but all of them. Not just the rich or the poor, not just people of one race or one creed, but all the people - the people to which the Declaration of Independence refers when it says: "All men are created equal ." -not equally gifted or equally rich, but equal under law.

". . . WHOSE JUST POWERS ARE DERIVED FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED . . ."

Every year, on Election Day, adult Americans have the right and duty to go to the polls and cast their vote about the way they want to be governed. The will of the majority becomes the will of the people - but nothing interferes with the right of the minority to think and say what they like.

". . . A DEMOCRACY IN A REPUBLIC. . ."

The word "democracy" itself tells of our form of government. It has come to us from the Greek: demos, the people, and krates, to rule. But imagine more than 180,000,000 people getting together some place at one time to rule a country! Such "absolute" democracy works all right in a small body of people, but it wouldn't work in a whole country where the people are spread out over millions of square miles. Our democracy is therefore the "representative" kind of democracy in which the governing is done by representatives who are elected by the people and are responsible to them. A country ruled in this way is called a "republic."

". . . A SOVEREIGN NATION OF MANY SOVEREIGN STATES . . ."

The government of our nation is located in Washington, District of Columbia, the capital of our country. Here, the Congress enacts federal laws, the Supreme Court interprets them, the executive branch of our government carries them out. But in addition, fifty separate state governments in fifty state capitals enact laws to suit the conditions of their "sovereign" states.

". . . A PERFECT UNION, ONE AND INSEPARABLE . . ."

The aim, of the Founding Fathers was to establish "a perfect union." But they realized that no union could be "perfect" if it were based solely on human beings with all their faults. They therefore relied on Divine Providence in setting up what they hoped would be a "perfect union." Today, in the motto of our country, we express that same conviction that our union can be perfect only by God's help: "In God We Trust."

". . . ESTABLISHED UPON THOSE PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM, EQUALITY, JUSTICE, AND HUMANITY FOR WHICH AMERICAN PATRIOTS SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES AND FORTUNES . . ."

Thousands of Americans gave their blood to create our democracy. Millions of loyal men and women have fought to keep it. In the struggle, more than half a million died on the battlefields. The willingness of these many Americans to die for our country should make all of us even more determined to live for it.

“. . . I THEREFORE BELIEVE IT IS MY DUTY TO MY COUNTRY TO LOVE IT . . .”

America is your country - her soil feeds you, her laws protect you and give you "the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." America deserves your love. America has a right to expect you to express that love in your deeds, in the way in which you train yourself for American citizenship.

“ . . . TO SUPPORT ITS CONSTITUTION . . . ”

The Constitution of the United States explains your rights as a citizen of our country - your right to religious liberty, to freedom of speech and of the press, to assemble peaceably, "to petition the government for a redress of grievances," to be secure in your person and property, to justice under law. By supporting the Constitution you keep all these rights. But remember that the rights that are yours are the rights of others as well. You have the right to worship God in your own way - see to it that others retain their right to worship God in their way. You have the right to speak your mind without fear of prison or punishment - ensure that right for others, even when you do not agree with them.

“ . . . TO OBEY ITS LAWS . . . ”

The laws of our country, the laws of your state, are written by the representatives of the American people for the good of all Americans. These laws govern much of our behavior in our daily lives. They draw the line between what is right and what is wrong and protect us against those who may want to do us ill. By obeying them you strengthen them and main - the protection they afford.

“ . . . TO RESPECT ITS FLAG . . . ”

The flag is the symbol of our country. When we show it our respect we show our respect and love for all that is America - our land, our people, our way of life. As a young American you may have learned how to handle the flag respectfully, how to display it, how to salute it. By following this teaching all through your life you will always know how to pay the nation the respect it deserves.

“ . . . AND TO DEFEND IT AGAINST ALL ENEMIES.”

It is fervent prayer of all of us that never again shall American men die on the battlefield. The way to ensure this is to help keep America strong and prepared to stand up against any foreign power that might desire to destroy us. But it is just as important to defend America against the enemies within our own borders - enemies who sow the seeds of distrust among our people, who try to stir up hatred, who attempt to ruin others by lies and smears, who break our laws.

The American's Creed is your creed as an American. By studying the creed you will know what is expected of you. By following it you will prove yourself a true American.

The Historical Notes: The American's Creed was a result of a nationwide contest for writing a National Creed, which would be a brief summary of the American political faith founded upon things fundamental in American history and tradition. The contest was the idea of Henry Sterling Chapin, Commissioner of Education of New York State. Over three thousand entries were received, and William Tyler Page was declared to be the winner. James H. Preston, the mayor of Baltimore, presented an award to Page in the House of Representatives Office Building on April

3, 1918. The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the commissioner of education of the state of New York accepted the Creed for the United States, and the proceedings relating to the award were printed in the Congressional Record of April 13, 1918. It was a time when patriotic sentiments were very much in vogue. The United States had been a participant in World War I only a little over a year at the time the Creed was adopted.

The author of the American's Creed, William Tyler Page, was a descendant of John Page, who had come to America in 1650 and had settled in Williamsburg, Virginia. Another ancestor, Carter Braxton, had signed the Declaration of Independence. Still another ancestor, John Tyler, was the tenth president of the United States. William Tyler Page had come to Washington at the age of thirteen to serve as a Capitol Page. Later he became an employee of the Capitol building and served in that capacity for almost sixty-one years. In 1919 he was elected clerk of the House. Thirteen years later, when the Democrats again became a majority party, they created for Page the office of minority clerk of the House of Representatives. He held this position for the remainder of his life.

Referring to the Creed, Page said: "It is the summary of the fundamental principles of the American political faith as set forth in its greatest documents, its worthiest traditions, and its greatest leaders." His wording of the Creed used passages and phrases from the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and Daniel Webster's reply to Robert Y. Hayne in the Senate in 1830.