

# Conversations

On Law & Liberty in Times of Crisis

## Pathway: Symbols of America

This cross-topic pathway explores the history and significance of some of the most enduring symbols of America and American values. The questions raised by the starters in this pathway speak to our understanding of our national values and the role of symbols in maintaining these values. The starters also ask whether the meaning of these symbols has changed over time, and whether the values they represent reflect our values today.

### **The Flag**

Starter 1: What is the history of the Pledge of Allegiance?

Starter 2: What does the Pledge of Allegiance represent today?

Starter 3: How does the flag act as a symbol of national identity?

### **The Statue of Liberty**

Starter: What values does the Statue of Liberty represent?

### **Uncle Sam**

Starter: How does Uncle Sam symbolize America?

Note: The views expressed here have not been approved by the House of Delegates or the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association, and accordingly, should not be construed as representing the policy of the American Bar Association, nor do they represent the official position or policies of the ABA Standing Committee on Public Education.

# Pathway: Symbols of America

## The Flag - Starter 1

### Issue

What is the history of the Pledge of Allegiance?

### Starter

"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

*Original Pledge of Allegiance, written by [Francis Bellamy](#), 1892*

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

*Current text of the Pledge of Allegiance*



### Focus Questions

- What does the Pledge of Allegiance mean to you as an American?
- Francis Bellamy, the author of the original Pledge, considered adding the word "equality," but decided against doing so. What do you think of including "equality" in the text of the Pledge? Where might it be placed? How would including "equality" in the Pledge change its meaning?
- The phrase "under God" was added by Congress in 1954. The Knights of Columbus, a Catholic Order, were influential in urging this change. How do you think this addition changes the meaning of the Pledge? What is its significance?
- John Baer has written: "Perhaps the time has come to see that this [American pledge of] allegiance should be to the U.S. Constitution and not to a piece of cloth." What do you think of this statement?

# Pathway: Symbols of America

## The Flag - Starter 2

### Issue

What does the Pledge of Allegiance represent today?

### Starter

[Writer Mark Singer traveled to Madison, Wisconsin, to report on the city's debate over a new state law mandating that all public and private schools recite the Pledge of Allegiance or sing the national anthem each day. The law was passed before September 11, but Madison's debate over implementing the law did not begin until after the terrorist attacks. As reported by Singer, the community's debate was extremely vigorous and heated. The Madison school board's final resolution of the issue was to let individual principals decide whether to offer the pledge or the national anthem, and to precede the daily ceremony with this preamble: "We live in a nation of freedom. Participation in the Pledge or Anthem is voluntary. Those who wish to participate may stand; others may remain seated." Singer visited a high school classroom in Madison to observe the morning ceremony. Of twenty-five students in the room, only one stood while the national anthem was played. Four boys made a point of leaving the room before the anthem began. The following are quotes from Singer's conversation with students that followed the playing of the anthem.]

"I believe in the Pledge of Allegiance and the national anthem, but if we have to do it day in, day out, it loses its value."

"It's promoting militarism and nationalism in the classroom, and I'm strongly against that."

"What's the difference between standing and sitting? Does standing mean that you appreciate it more?"

"If we were required to recite the pledge each day instead of listening to the national anthem, I would have found a stronger form of expression than leaving the room."

"Sitting isn't going against the government. When I sit during the national anthem, I'm probably thinking more about my country than those who stand. I'm thinking that I'm grateful to live in a nation where I have the ability to sit or stand. But I still disagree with many of the things our government is doing right now, and by sitting I'm making a statement to that effect."



Mark Singer

"I know of another school in Wisconsin where they've tried hard to come up with a more musically interesting version of the anthem. There's a Whitney Houston version, I think, and a Marvin Gaye version, and a Jimi Hendrix version."

"I'd stand up for Jimi Hendrix."

Excerpt from Mark Singer, "I Pledge Allegiance," in [\*The New Yorker\*](#) (November 26, 2001)

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Photo courtesy of Mark Singer.

### **Focus Questions**

- What do you think of the arguments these students make regarding their decision not to stand during the playing of the national anthem?
- Is there value in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance or playing the national anthem each day?
- Do you agree with the Madison school board's decision to emphasize that participation in the pledge or anthem is voluntary?

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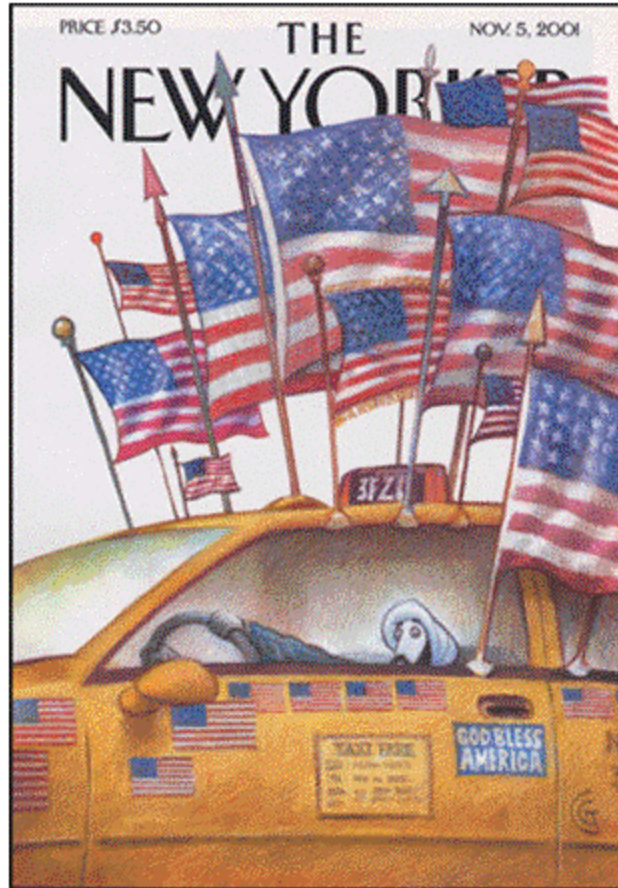
## The Flag - Starter 3

### Issue

How does the flag act as a symbol of national identity?

### Starter

November 5, 2001 cover of [The New Yorker Magazine](#)



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### Focus Questions

- How would you describe the taxicab driver in this illustration? What does his appearance and expression suggest to you?
- What messages do you think are suggested by this illustration? What is the significance of the use of the American flag in the illustration? What does the illustration suggest to you about American identities?

# Pathway: Symbols of America

## The Statue of Liberty

### Issue

What values does the Statue of Liberty represent?

### Starter

*The New Colossus* (1883)

by [Emma Lazarus](#)

*Inscribed on the Statue of Liberty in 1903*

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates Shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles.

From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes  
command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp! Cries she  
With silent lips.

"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"



### Focus Questions

- What ideas or values come to your mind when you visualize the Statue of Liberty?
- The New Colossus ends "*Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*" What view of immigrants to America does this suggest to you? What do you think the Statue of Liberty means to immigrants coming to America today? How do

immigrants become Americans?

- Today, in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, how might you rewrite an inscription for the Statue of Liberty? What would it say? For whom would it be written?

# Pathway: Symbols of America

## Uncle Sam

### Issue

How does Uncle Sam symbolize America?

### Starter

Pat Oliphant, "Watch Out for the Backswing, Kid" (political cartoon)



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### Focus Questions

- Why do you think Oliphant chose to depict Civil Liberties as a young child waving an American flag?
- What do you think Uncle Sam represents in this cartoon?
- How do you interpret Uncle Sam's attitude toward Civil Liberties?
- Do you believe this cartoon accurately reflects the position of civil liberties after September 11, 2001?