

From the Editor.

Since childhood I have experienced discomfort with reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. *"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United State of America, and to the Republic for which it stands..."* Wow, what a promise. Somehow, even as a child, I knew that allegiance meant an unwavering loyalty to which I could not fully commit. So, I simply didn't repeat it.

Now, as an adult who has witnessed the failures of *"the Republic for which [the flag] stands..."* to protect and uplift all of its people, that discomfort has morphed into a refusal to offer loyalty that is not reciprocated. To be clear, I do not have a problem with the flag. It's cloth, just thread and dye. The problem is the Republic behind it. *"The Republic for which it stands..."* is led by a man who posted on social media that Democratic leaders should be hanged, inciting violence against his own colleagues. *"The Republic for which it stands..."* cuts public education resources, placing schools, disabled students, and low-income communities at risk. *"The Republic for which it stands..."* continues attempts to roll back affordable healthcare — knowing the consequences will be felt most by those already living on the margins. *"The Republic for which it stands..."* supports policies that remove food assistance from millions of Americans, including children. *"The Republic for which it stands..."* has permitted law enforcement tactics that include unlawful and violent detentions of people who "appear" to be immigrants — stripping families of both safety and due process. *"The Republic for which it stands..."* has allowed hatred, misinformation, and racial hierarchy to take deeper root in systems that demand fairness and courage in leadership.

"...One nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

Yet we are undeniably divided. One's experience with nearly every major American system — from criminal justice to healthcare to employment — can be predicted by demographic markers. For example, Black Americans are incarcerated at nearly five times the rate of white Americans (NAACP, 2024). That disparity alone fractures the notion of indivisibility.

So, are we being asked to pledge allegiance to an ideal? An aspiration? Perhaps the words should be updated to: *"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the idea of a Republic toward which it postures. One nation under God, though divided among its people, some who give their lives for the dream of liberty and justice for all."*

That feels more honest. Because true allegiance should be earned by a nation's commitment to equity, not demanded in exchange for silence. And responsible leadership requires us to name and close the gap between who we are and who we claim to be, so we can close it together.

In Black,

Alpha Woolen



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