

Boy Scout Jamboree, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, July 4, 1950
Dwight D. Eisenhower

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Boy Scouts, friends. Simple are the words in the pledge of allegiance to the flag, but within it is the core of the American code—molded in the fire of revolution, hammered on the anvil of battle, rested and proved through seventeen decades of arduous yet glorious trial. I hope that, as you Scouts repeated its phrases of dedication, you were joined by your parents, sisters, brothers and friends throughout the breadth and length of this land. The times demand that every American be proud to proclaim his loyalty.

Here in Valley Forge, on July Fourth, both day and place join with our voices to fortify us in the allegiance that we declare. We celebrate the anniversary of our Independence Declaration on the spot where the resolution of our nation’s founders met and surmounted its sorest trial.

The ideas set forth in that Declaration shattered political shackles as old as humanity. Through the mounting years, since they were written, they have heartened others across the world in defiance of tyranny. They still inspire men to labor and to sacrifice: even to risk the grim tragedy of war in order that human freedom may not be torn from peoples, by themselves, too weak to resist ruthless attack.

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In our affections and admiration, each of us has his own particular reasons for placing the Father of our Country above all other citizens. Some of us may think of him principally as the battle leader, especially in his moment of triumph at Yorktown. We see him crossing the icy Delaware to initiate a march whose daring thrills us; it stands in military annals as an example of what courage and boldness can do. We respect the wise and firm hand he kept upon the helm of State as he guided the Republic through her first eight years. We hear the words of his farewell to his army, of his Newburgh address. We salute the statesmanship of his final farewell to public life. Yet most of us at the Boy Scout encampment would likely agree that the crowning glory of his whole career was Valley Forge.

To this spot Washington led his defeated and retreating army—to the cold hardships of a bitter winter. Discouragement was his daily ration. He seemed deserted by the Continental Congress and abandoned to bear burdens that were almost unbearable. He lost, from starvation and freezing, during that winter, more than 3,000 out of his tiny army. When we consider how he, singlehanded, kept his forces together during those long days and months, hearing the pitiful cries of the suffering and witnessing the despair in the eyes of the dying, we gain some faint understanding of the greatness of spirit of George Washington. In doing so, we turn to our own problems of today with increased confidence. Here at Valley Forge, every relic, every

monument assures us that even hunger, pain, nakedness and indescribable hardship cannot wholly dishearten those whose spirit is steeped in faith and in loyalty to a lofty purpose.

This place is an eternal witness to the worth—and to the cost—of the liberty we possess. Men here proved that they valued it above comfort or safety, as they paid for it in pain and blood and life. We pray that no obligation to our country may ever again demand such a price; but any who dodges the least duty of citizenship nullifies, that much, the heroism of Valley Forge. They shall lose freedom who think it may be preserved without sweat and sacrifice.

But we do not depend upon Valley Forge alone for inspiration. With us every day of our lives, is the flag that stands for more than victory in war or richness in peace. The American flag represents what the multitudes of humanity have yearned for through the ages—friendship among men, liberty for men, justice toward men. America, under God, is a way of life ruled by the eternal truths of human brotherhood, human dignity, human rights. Whatever our frailty, our defects of deed or mind, our errors or our prejudices of the past, no one of us can fail to grow stronger in loyalty, stouter in the performance of duty, richer in good will when he humbly stands before the symbol of free America.

Among ourselves, we do not speak openly and frankly, as often as we should, of patriotism—love of country. It is not that we fear the jeering of the smart-aleck; possibly we forget that men grow in stature only as they daily rededicate themselves to a noble faith. More likely, we thoughtlessly assume our blessings of liberty to be indestructible.

True patriotism places the public good above individual advantage. It is not tainted by false pride in might, in size, in overwhelming power; it never seeks to compel others to a blind obedience to our wishes. It is among the greatest of human virtues. Fortunate are we whose devotion is to a country that seeks the good of all its citizens, without distinction, that firmly champions the cause of human rights, and offers the hand of friendship to every other nation whose purpose is peace and justice.

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The glory of this nation is that it was conceived in courage, born in sacrifice and reached its maturity in the unselfish devotion and labor of patriots. So long as time endures, America will need these qualities of her citizens. And so long as these qualities do endure, so long will this country stand free, strong and pre-eminent among the nations. The future is bright when America with one voice, with a stout heart and with utter sincerity, says: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."