

OPINIONS

Quotable Quotes



"The First Amendment is a force to be reckoned with and I want to contribute to its strength." -Brooke Stutler, 18, Bracken County High School Graduate



"Thank God for freedom of religion." -Chase Medved, 17, Western Hills High School



"Your mom likes the First Amendment." -Katie Vass, 16, Tates Creek High School



"I'm thankful for the First Amendment, because without it I couldn't criticize the government." -Jessica VanWinkle, 16, Western Hills High School



"Speak up for your rights or they may disappear." -Kaycee Brown, 17, South Oldham High School



"The First Amendment is what keeps us different." -Kelly Parks, 16, Tates Creek High School



"It allows me to say whatever I want, even if I say it so fast that no one understands it." -Charlotte Kyle, 16, Pleasure Ridge Park High School



"The First Amendment is essential to democracy. Without it true democracy doesn't work." -Helen O Daniel, Henderson County High School



"Without the First Amendment I'd be forced to shut up and listen." -Kayleigh Roberts, 16, Pleasure Ridge Park High School



"The First Amendment rocks my socks." -Amanda Morris, 18, Henderson County High School Graduate

One nation under the First Amendment, not God, is true American freedom

by Katie Vass
Workshop Participant

"One nation, under God, indivisible." With liberty and justice for all? America prides itself on being a nation of freedom and individual expression. But every day, at sporting events, in public schools and at the workplace, people recite the Pledge of Allegiance that doesn't respect these ideals we hold to such esteem.

Even though our government is run with the idea of separation of church and state and with the First Amendment guaranteeing a freedom of religion, every day there is still a suppression of that right. When Americans, be they atheist, Christian, Muslim or Wiccan, are consistently repeating "under God" in the pledge, one of their fundamental freedoms is being violated.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution begins, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of reli-

gion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

If we retain the "under God" phrase, we will be violating the free exercise aspect of the amendment.

America's foundation was built on freedom, and many of America's founding fathers were religious people. But these intellectual men had the foresight to create our government separate from their respective churches. Forcing students to recite the pledge is an act of un-patriotism because it compels students to speak words he or she doesn't believe.

The words "under God" in our pledge is a religious endorsement, something that should not be included in homage to our country. These words, which can be considered a prayer, do imply that certain belief systems are "wrong" or "un-American."

If America were to remove "under God" from the pledge, it would be proof of our acknowledgement of our country

as a true melting pot of people with very diverse beliefs. Until we do this, we are still running our country with an underlying religious theme, and that shouldn't be what this country stands for. The words "under God" to the pledge were added in 1954 during a time of political turmoil after World War II.

We are moving in the right direction in certain aspects. In West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette (1943) the Supreme Court ruled that students could not be compelled to recite the pledge or salute the flag if they felt opposed.

With the McCollum v. Board of Education and the Engel v. Vitale decisions the Supreme Court has established these precedents in public schools: they cannot offer prayers or a moment of silence, they cannot post the Ten Commandments, and teachers cannot teach theology or creationism.

The religious tie-ins

with the government don't end with the pledge. All American currency is emblazoned with the words "In God we trust."

The issue of the phrasing of the Pledge of Allegiance has not been ignored. In 2002 Michael Newdow brought his case to remove "Under God" from the pledge to the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. It was decided, 2-1, that the use of "under God" was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court tossed out the case on a technicality.

If America wants to maintain its democratic reputation, with fairness and equality for everyone, then our government needs to remove its constant references to monotheistic religions, on our currency, in our classrooms and in our public buildings. Otherwise, we will be a standing contradiction, doing the very thing that we have banned with the First Amendment to our Constitution.

The problem with the music is a lack of parental supervision, so stop with the silly record labels

Charlotte Kyle
Workshop participant

I wouldn't listen to that CD if I were you. If you do you'll become heavily involved in drugs, crime and other destructive behavior.

The argument many try to make in favor of music censorship sounds completely absurd. To say that the lyrics to a song will affect the way America's youth will behave is ridiculous. Chances are the kids who are turning to drugs and violence are not doing it just because the newest and coolest artist rapped about it, but because they have problems the adults around them didn't see or haven't successfully solved.

Music censorship most notably started with the non-removable black-and-white label that is now placed on the CD. This label began under the Recording Industry Association of America and the Parents Resource Music Center. The record companies and artists decide what to get labeled. About 500 out of 110,000 CDs carry the label, according to the RIAA. The reason for the labels is to warn parents of explicit content featuring violence, drugs and sex.

It's not so much the label that annoys me. Parents have the right to know what their kids are listening to. In fact, that's

part of it. Parents should know. Parents who care about this sort of thing should monitor what their children listen to, watch, read, and the people they hang out with instead of complaining that there's too much violence or sex in the media. It's not America's job to raise the children; it's the parents.

Some CDs without this black-and-white label have been considered "destructive" because of the content. This content includes strong language and lyrics about sex, drugs, violence and suicide. On April 26, 2003, 17-year-old Jessie Kasper took her life. Afterward an article appeared in a magazine under the name "My Daughter's Suicide Song" in which the parents spoke of Jessie's love for rock music. On her suicide note she wrote down the titles of two tracks: Good Charlotte's "The Day That I Die" and Blink 182's "Adam's Song." The parents blamed this music for their daughter's suicide.

While it can never be known exactly why this girl hanged herself that night, to instantly blame the music because of two songs on two albums is unfair. I listen to both bands and have never considered killing myself. It's obvious that the parents who felt this way did not listen to other tracks by the bands. Good Charlotte is anti-suicide, having even written a

song on that same album entitled "Hold On." The lyrics include "hold on if you feel like letting go / hold on it gets better than you know / don't stop looking, you're one step closer / don't stop searching, it's not over." The song was written because of fans who had told their stories to the band, saying how they used to be messed up and the band's music had helped them get through it.

On top of that, the article even states that Jessie had confided in her friends that she had thought about killing herself. Her friends simply hadn't told any adults as an act of loyalty. I understand the parents were upset, feeling pain that I cannot relate to in anyway. They wanted to blame whomever they could and the music seemed like an obvious answer.

I don't believe music could have that strong of an effect on a person. Music artists influence a lot of things. Many kids look up to their favorite singers and bands, dressing like they do or picking up the same mannerisms. That's understandable. The artist is considered cool so being like them makes you cool. The only problem with that argument, though, is that the majority of the times the artists they're listening to are still alive. Just writing lyrics about something doesn't mean it'll

make me want to do it. I've heard plenty of songs about drinking, smoking and other destructive behavior. I've never committed these acts myself because my parents have taught me better than that. To say that the music made a kid do anything is completely off base.

So what does blaming the music have to do with censorship besides those labels that don't matter to kids much anyway? Enter Wal-Mart, the Wal-Mart friendly store. Wal-Mart is one of the largest music retailers in the world and because of this fact it has enough pull with the record label to have the artists' music altered. Sometimes the consumer doesn't know the music is altered, as most of the time labels on individual CDs are not existent or in an easy-to-see spot. It isn't right for the fans to not know what they're buying isn't the artists' original creation?

There's a difference between editing for content so the song can be played on the radio or on MTV and editing the music entirely when it's for someone's personal listening. Even after these edits kids will still know what the songs are about or find other ways to hear the original versions. It is then that the parents should take note of what their children are listening to.