



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 29, 2019

“Racism” if Harriet Tubman Not on \$20 Bill

The decision to delay placing the image of Harriet Tubman (shown), a conductor on the famed Underground Railroad that aided fugitive slaves before the abolition of slavery in 1865, on the \$20 federal reserve note supposedly “smacks of racism.” At least that is what Ernestine Wyatt, a distant niece of Tubman, said on CNN this week when offering her opinion as to why her famous ancestor will not replace President Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill anytime soon.



The process to take Jackson off the \$20 bill began during the administration of President Barack Obama and his treasury secretary, Jack Lew. Trump’s secretary of the treasury, Steve Mnuchin, was asked last week about when Tubman’s image would finally replace Jackson, and he told a congressional committee, “I’ve made no decision that relates to that, and that decision won’t be made until 2026.”

Mnuchin told Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.) that his priority is ensuring new security features to protect U.S. currency from counterfeiting efforts, and once that is done, he will review what images appear on the currency.

Another distant niece of Tubman’s, Pauline Copes Johnson, also chalked up the delay to racism, adding a charge of sexism for good measure. She told a local TV station in Auburn, New York, “This new treasurer, I don’t know how to pronounce his name. He takes his orders from President Trump. Neither one of them want to see Aunt Harriet on the \$20 bill. I think because she was a woman, and because she was a black woman, and they think it’s terrible to have a black woman on the currency.”

Such accusations could lead anyone to ask, “How do you know that? Can you read Trump’s mind? Can you read Mnuchin’s mind?”

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Such incendiary remarks by relatives of Tubman are understandable, but not only does the mainstream media not question them, they adopt use of the same argument of racism and sexism. For example, Laura Washington of the *Chicago Sun-Times* wrote, “Trump rose to power by denigrating, discounting and humiliating women, especially women of color. It’s just one more way Trump is telegraphing to the racists and sexists in his base that ‘we’ are never giving up this country.”

Michael Gerson, in a column for the *Washington Post*, also cast any failure to put Tubman on the \$20 note in the context of race. Gerson, a member of the George W. Bush administration, has made a career out of being a supposed conservative who writes things critical of conservatives.

Andy Ambrose, the director of the Tubman Museum, said much the same thing. According to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Ambrose said, “This is part and parcel of the history of this country and the way in which African-American women have been, and continue to be, treated and unacknowledged.”

President Trump, during the 2016 presidential campaign, dismissed the effort to put Tubman on the



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\$20 bill as an example of “political correctness.” It certainly would appear that almost every decision government makes any more must be measured against some sort of unofficial quota system, and Tubman certainly fills two such slots.

But Tubman would not be the first woman to appear on American currency. Martha Washington was the last woman to appear on the currency, but another woman, the Powhatan Indian princess Pocahontas, was another. Pocahontas was critical in the history of Virginia. Her marriage to tobacco planter John Rolfe led to better relations between the Native Americans and the English settlers. Several famous descendants sprang from the marriage, including Congressman John Randolph of Roanoke.

But no black person, male or female, has ever appeared on U.S. currency. (Of course, only a handful of Americans of any race or sex have ever appeared out of the millions of citizens in the country’s history.) Several famous African-Americans could certainly be considered for such an honor, such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver. What is there about the life of Harriet Tubman that would make her the first black American on U.S. paper money, instead of them? That is a question that should be asked by some enterprising young journalist.

Tubman was no doubt courageous in her role as a “conductor” for the Underground Railroad, a system of helping fugitive slaves escape from slavery. Her carrying of a pistol could even serve as an example for gun-rights advocates. But, alas, Tubman also supported the madman John Brown in his infamous raid on Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, in 1859, when Brown murdered innocent people, including a black railroad worker, in his attempt to overthrow the U.S. government. Tubman’s support for Brown came after he had murdered a farm family in Kansas, hacking them to pieces with a sword, simply because they had moved to Kansas from Tennessee, a slave state. But the family had never owned any slaves — in fact, they had moved to Kansas largely because they detested slavery.

No person in American history is without flaws, and any person who might be put on the currency will be a person with flaws. Not surprisingly, the movement to put Tubman on the \$20 bill makes liberal use of the alleged flaws of Andrew Jackson, who would be replaced.

Jackson certainly had his flaws. Critics claim he hated Indians, but he adopted two Indian children as his own, and publicly supported marriages between white Americans and indigenous peoples. But, on the other hand, his role in American history is immense. Because of his victory at New Orleans during the War of 1812, the United States did not lose the western frontier to the British. For those who argue that the spectacular victory came *after* a treaty of peace was signed, the reality is that had Jackson lost the Battle of New Orleans, the British Parliament would not have ratified the Treaty of Ghent.

David Craig, writing in the *Baltimore Sun*, offered an interesting idea that would enable Americans to honor more historical figures. “All seven of our current bills ... could be converted to be a 50-50 bill. That means half of the \$1 bill would always have George Washington on it; the other half would be printed with another historic American on it.... Doing it as a 50-50 could help to keep happy those who love the current person on the bill and also help those who want a new person on the bill; both would get their way.”

Unfortunately for the Left, however, that would not allow them to draw the race and sex cards and divide Americans.



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