

Why Harriet Tubman Was Always Going to Be Picked

Last summer, I predicted that Harriet Tubman would be replacing Alexander Hamilton on the \$10 bill. I was almost right. She'll be replacing Andrew Jackson.

The U.S. Treasury announced last year that the \$10 bill is the next paper currency scheduled for a major redesign—a process that takes years because of the anti-counterfeiting technology involved—and will feature a “notable woman.”

The new \$10 will be unveiled in 2020, the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment, which gave women the right to vote. As the Treasury explained, “The passage of the nineteenth amendment granted women their right to fully participate in the system our country was founded on—a government by the people, a democracy.”

In a post last June I wrote: “I’m almost certain they already know who Treasury is going to choose: It’s going to be Harriet Tubman.” Instead, it was Jackson who got demoted to the back of the currency while Tubman will take his place on the front.

I think the Treasury made the right decision. As the first Treasury secretary, Hamilton deserved to stick around on the \$10 (leaders of the women’s suffrage movement will be featured on the other side). But it was time for a woman to join the men on our money and, based on the criteria used for consideration, Tubman is a solid choice. She was not only an abolitionist, she served in the Civil War as a Union spy and became the only woman during that conflict to lead men into a battle.

Unfortunately, fans of Tubman will have to wait a while longer to see her new portrait: the \$20 isn’t scheduled for a redesign until 2030.

In the meantime, here was my reasoning from last year on why Tubman was all but inevitable based on the Treasury's criteria for a "noble woman" candidate:

She will be dead, and pro-democracy—A primary criteria for getting your face on America's money is that you have to be dead. Plenty of famous women meet that criteria, of course, but that's the first hurdle. The second one sets a higher bar. As the Treasury website notes:

Democracy is the theme for the next redesigned series and the Secretary will select a woman recognized by the public who was a champion for democracy in the United States. The person should be iconic and have made a significant contribution to—or impact on—protecting the freedoms on which our nation was founded.

That requirement narrows the field considerably.

She will have name recognition—If you didn't hear her name mentioned in history class in junior high, you likely won't see her name linked to the new ten.

She will not be Susan B. Anthony—Anthony seems like she would be the obvious choice, considering her connection to the 19th Amendment. And she has plenty of champions (such as Dominic Bouck, O.P. at *First Things*) who would love to see her share the bill with Alexander Hamilton. But there is also an obvious reason it won't be Anthony: she was already on the dollar.

The Susan B. Anthony dollar was a dollar coin minted from 1979 to 1981 and again in 1999. The public hated it—not Anthony, just the coin (which was too similar in size to the quarter). But Anthony had her shot. The Treasury Department is not going to waste this historic opportunity to simply shift Anthony's visage from a coin to a paper bill.

She will be African-American—To date, only two women have

appeared on U.S. paper currency. One was white (Martha Washington) and the other was Native American (Pocahontas). It's time for an African-American woman.

In light of those tentative requirements, the field is narrowed to only three candidates: Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth.

Parks has been called the "mother of the civil rights movement" because of her role in the Montgomery bus boycott. She was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1993, was presented the Medal of Freedom Award by President Bill Clinton in 1996 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999, and after her death on Oct. 24, 2005, Congress approved a resolution allowing her body to lie in honor in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. She's a solid contender, but she's too current a figure.

At the time of the currency unveiling, Parks will have been gone from this life for 15 years. Assuming that America will continue to exist and that Bitcoin won't replace paper money, there will be plenty of opportunities in the future to honor Parks by putting her on our money.

That leaves only Tubman and Truth.

Both Tubman and Truth were former slaves who became abolitionists and later fought for women's suffrage alongside Susan B. Anthony. Both are the very models of "inclusive democracy," which make both the primary contenders for placement on the new \$10.

I could have titled this article "Why Sojourner Truth Will Be on the \$10 Bill"—and I almost did. If Truth were chosen over Tubman, it'd be only a mild surprise. But Tubman gains a slight advantage because of her name recognition.

Tubman is better known because her role in the abolition movement is slightly more impressive. Truth gained prominence

mainly as a speaker while Tubman was active in helping slaves escape to freedom. The abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison even dubbed Tubman “Moses” because of the way she led her people out of bondage.

For these reasons, Harriet Tubman will be the one sharing space on the new \$10 with Alexander Hamilton, the only Founding Father on our currency who never owned slaves.

How sure am I this will be Treasurer Lew’s choice? Almost certain. If I were a betting man, I’d bet you a \$10 it’ll be Tubman. {eo}

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