Negative Brief: Harriet Tubman Tribute Act of 2019

By Jonathan T. Helton

**Resolved: The United States Federal Government should substantially reform its banking, finance, and/or monetary policy.**

The Harriet Tubman Tribute Act of 2019 would immediately replace the picture of Andrew Jackson on the $20 bill with Tubman’s, starting 1 January 2021. This is supposed to honor her oppression and her heroism in overcoming it as a woman and former slave. However, this Negative brief argues that putting Harriet Tubman on the $20 bill would not be a tribute, but an insult. Considering that the legacy of racism and slavery continue in the U.S. and that discrimination still exists among certain people, this gesture is only masking the issue. It won’t do anything to make people change. But it might make them feel better about themselves, which would be counterproductive. (“Hey, we put a black lady on the 20! Problem solved! “) Leaving the slave-owning Jackson on the $20 sends a message about what needs to be done. Tubman herself never would have wanted to be on our currency, so leaving her off is the best way to honor her legacy.

Additionally, there are “security concerns” regarding the release of the new $20. That is one reason that the Treasury slowed down its release. Starting it up again might allow counterfeiters to take advantage of a sloppily designed bill.

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Impact: Distracts from the real issue. These bills will only serve a vehicle for white oppression. Putting someone’s face on a bill will not solve the current problems the U.S. has with racism and discrimination. 9

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It’s a trap: The government would use this measure to distract from the real issues about the way black women are treated. It’s a gesture to placate those who support “multiculturalism,” and makes black womanhood nameless 10

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Negative: Harriet Tubman Tribute Act of 2019

NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Ironic and distasteful

Kirsten West Savali 2015 (cultural critic and an associate editor at The Root. She is the recipient of the 2016 Vernon Jarrett Medal for Journalistic Excellence, was named to Ebony magazine’s 2015 “Power 100” list.) 13 March 2015 “Why We Should Keep Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks Off the $20 Bill” <https://www.theroot.com/why-we-should-keep-harriet-tubman-and-rosa-parks-off-th-1790859437>

Specifically, there is something both distasteful and ironic about putting a black woman’s face on the most [frequently counterfeited](http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/08/us-usa-currency-idUSBRE9970IZ20131008) and most [commonly traded](http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/11/-100-bills-make-up-80-of-all-us-currency-but-why/265518/) dollar bill in this country. Haven’t we been commodified and [trafficked](http://www.blackwomensblueprint.org/2014/03/28/black-women-sexual-assault-and-sexual-exploitation-a-brief-summary/) enough? Slapping a black female face, one of our radical icons, on a $20 bill as if it’s some attainment of the American dream would be adding insult to injury.

SOLVENCY

1. Doesn’t solve or achieve anything. Oppression of Black people continues.

Now is not the time to remember something that “happened in the past” since it is still happening.

Dr. Franco Barchiesi and Sheneese Thompson 2018 (Barchiesi: Department of Comparative Studies and Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ. Was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Univ of the Witwatersrand (S. Africa). PH.D., Sociology. Thompson- PhD Candidate, Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ) “Harriet Tubman and Andrew Jackson on the Twenty-Dollar Bill: A Monstrous Intimacy” 20 November 2018 (brackets in original) <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0038/culture-2018-0038.pdf>

Why Jackson? Why Tubman? Especially: Why now? Christopher Lloyd suggests that the contemporary moment—the departure of Barack Obama, the election of Donald Trump and the gratuitous violence against unarmed African American by police and civilians alike—warrants “attempting to grapple with [slavery’s] memory now.” Lloyd continues: “With Tubman’s face now set to adorn the twenty-dollar bill, it attests to the widespread interest and investment in this part of American history. No doubt, the narrative of escape—of potential freedom and an ostensible happy ending—plays into the desire to remember the railroad. This is a cultural memory Americans can perhaps feel good about.” While Lloyd may be onto something about this historical and cultural moment, he misses the mark regarding American memory as it pertains to enslavement. Tubman’s face “adorning” the twenty-dollar bill does not serve the purpose of paying homage to the underground railroad, and cannot celebrate some happy ending that African Americans never experienced since they are still being terrorized by the United States government (from the sanctioning of physical white violence against Black bodies to financial predation, families devastated by social policy, and communities ravaged by environmental racism). It does, however, contribute to the never-ending labour of white American catharsis. Tubman must thus be appropriated as an American icon and further, “her redemption as incorporation [is] allow[ing] continued injustice to be rewritten as freedom” (Sharpe, Monstrous 109.) Currency, literally a symbolic down payment on a constantly deferred promise, is the ideal vehicle for this purpose, not least because of the relationality of exchange it alludes to.

Impact: Nothing changes

Kirsten West Savali 2015 (cultural critic and an associate editor at The Root. She is the recipient of the 2016 Vernon Jarrett Medal for Journalistic Excellence, was named to Ebony magazine’s 2015 “Power 100” list and awarded a 2015 Harry Frank Guggenheim Fellowship.) 13 March 2015 “Why We Should Keep Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks Off the $20 Bill” <https://www.theroot.com/why-we-should-keep-harriet-tubman-and-rosa-parks-off-th-1790859437>

And frankly, putting a white woman’s face on a bill would be akin to Hillary Clinton becoming the president of the United States: a woman’s face on the same old racist, patriarchal political system that continues in both insidious and blatant ways to disenfranchise women and people of color. That’s not progress. It’s hush money.

President Trump was right: This is an empty political gesture

Dr. Franco Barchiesi and Sheneese Thompson 2018 (Barchiesi: Department of Comparative Studies and Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ. Was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Univ of the Witwatersrand (S. Africa). PH.D., Sociology. Thompson- PhD Candidate, Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ) “Harriet Tubman and Andrew Jackson on the Twenty-Dollar Bill: A Monstrous Intimacy” 20 November 2018 <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0038/culture-2018-0038.pdf>

In her book, Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America, Hartman (4) wants to “illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle.” Following this line of reasoning, including Harriet Tubman on the twenty-dollar bill with Andrew Jackson is both mundane and quotidian as well as a shocking spectacle. Not unlike the crimes of slavery Hartman describes in the first chapter of her book, this kind of usurpation of Tubman’s memory and iconography was in fact “staged.” Tubman was not just appointed; she was entered into a competition with other historical female figures. Apparently, a representative sample of the same white American population that supported overwhelmingly Donald Trump’s rhetoric also responded positively to Tubman, which is why, the public is told, she was selected. Significantly, Trump announced his qualms with Tubman’s inclusion on the twenty-dollar bill, calling it “pure political correctness,” and suggesting that she be put on a lower bill, like the rare two-dollar bill (Rhodan). Though offensive on its face, Trump’s comment in this instance points to both the emptiness and the fullness of Tubman’s appropriation. Tubman’s selection was staged to look very much like an incorporation of African Americans on equal footing into the nation’s master narrative, as well as its making good on a long overdue debt to Tubman for her service. But it is Jackson to be “the bearer of civil society’s discontents; he stages its ethical dilemmas” (Wilderson, Red 290.) Despite the thorough staging of this spectacle of reparation, any attempt at historical reconciliation falls flat against what Trump calls Andrew Jackson’s “great history” (Rhodan), as well as the contemporary subjection of Black people.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Counterfeiting

Link: 8.9 billion $20 bills

Bonnie Gringer 2016 (Online Marketing Manager and Content Developer at TMX Finance) (ethical note: Article is undated but refers to data published in 2016) “HOW MANY DOLLAR BILLS ARE IN CIRCULATION?” <https://www.titlemax.com/discovery-center/money-finance/how-many-dollar-bill-circulated/>

There are approximately 11.7 billion one dollar bills in circulation in the US, with 8.9 billion 20 dollar bills and 11.5 billion 100 dollar bills. There are about [39.8 billion notes](https://www.federalreserve.gov/paymentsystems/coin_currcircvolume.htm) in circulation all together. For coins, there are about [28 billion](https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/faqs/Coins/Pages/edu_faq_coins_production.aspx) in general circulation.

Link: Tubman was delayed due to counterfeiting risk, according to Treasury Secretary Mnuchin

Natasha Frost 2019 (reporter at Quartz. She grew up in Singapore and New Zealand, attended the University of Oxford, and received a MS in journalism from Columbia University. Formerly of the BBC and Radio New Zealand) 22 May 2019 “Don’t hold your breath for the Harriet Tubman $20 bill” <https://qz.com/1625902/the-20-harriet-tubman-bill-is-delayed-until-2028/>

“The primary reason we have looked at redesigning the currency is for counterfeiting issues,” [Mnuchin told the House Financial Services Committee](https://www.cnbc.com/2019/05/22/harriet-tubman-20-bill-no-longer-coming-in-2020.html). “Based upon this, the $20 bill will now not come out until 2028. The $10 bill and the $50 bill will come out with new features beforehand.”

Internal link: Robust security requires more time

Nicholas Wu, Ledyard King, and Deborah Barfield Berry 2019 (politics reporter with the Politics NOW team. Previously, he was a fellow at National Journal; went to Princeton University, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Ledyard King covers NASA and EPA. Berry: Washington correspondent) USA TODAY 18 May 2019 “Should the Harriet Tubman $20 bill be delayed? The currency process, explained” <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/05/28/steve-mnuchins-delay-20-harriet-tubman-bill-design-explained/1227638001/>

“At this time, additional work needs to be done to develop more robust public security features for the $20,” Lydia Washington, spokeswoman for the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, said in an email to USA Today.

Example: The $100 bill took 15 years to develop good security features

Nicholas Wu, Ledyard King, and Deborah Barfield Berry 2019 (Nicholas Wu is a politics reporter with the Politics NOW team. Previously, he was a fellow at National Journal. A native of Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan, Nicholas went to Princeton University, where he majored in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Ledyard King covers NASA and EPA. Berry: Washington correspondent) 18 May 2019 “Should the Harriet Tubman $20 bill be delayed? The currency process, explained” <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/05/28/steve-mnuchins-delay-20-harriet-tubman-bill-design-explained/1227638001/>

The [2013 version of the $100 bill](https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/10/07/100-dollar-bill/2936097/) features a blue security strip that took [15 years to develop](https://www.wired.com/2016/04/harriet-tubman-20/), according to Wired. And even after the new bill was announced, in 2010, they [did not enter circulation](https://web.archive.org/web/20130428201922/http:/www.newmoney.gov/uscurrency/redesigned100.htm) until three years later, in 2013.

Impact: Counterfeiting hurts consumers, hurts the economy, wastes law enforcement resources

Andrea Lombardi 2015 (works for CashTech, market-leading provider of maintenance and technical service solutions to financial institutions. Bachelor’s degree from the U. of Western Ontario.) 7 Sept 2015 “Why Counterfeit Detection Is More Important Than You Think” <https://www.cashtechcurrency.com/blog/why-counterfeit-detection-is-more-important-than-you-think>

Having to absorb the loss due to counterfeit isn’t something any business owner wants to be forced to do. But there are bigger issues at play. When you look at the bigger picture, counterfeit affects us all. It increases costs of goods for consumers as stores increase their prices to make up for the losses. But more significantly, it’s also a national issue. Having counterfeit money in circulation is harmful on the economy. It can devalue our dollar, which has national and international effects. It also forces law enforcement to put more government money and manpower behind anti-counterfeit taskforces.

2. Undermines racial equality

Economically: Harriet Tubman resisted “the foundation of American capitalism”; she wouldn’t want to represent it

Feminista Jones 2016 (Philadelphia-based social worker, feminist writer, public speaker, and community activist. She is an award-winning blogger; Her work centers Black American culture, critical race theory, intersectionality, women’s health and well-being. She sits on the board of the Wayfinder Foundation, a grant-making organization that invests in women making a difference in their underserved communities, and The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.) 21 April 2016 “Keep Harriet Tubman - and All Women - off the $20 Bill” <https://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/36446-keep-harriet-tubman-and-all-women-off-the-20-bill>

On one hand, replacing the face of Andrew Jackson – a man whose [wealth](http://thehermitage.com/learn/mansion-grounds/slavery/) was made on the backs of enslaved black people – with Tubman’s image sounds like an idyllic reversal of fortune. But in examining Tubman’s life, it’s clear that putting her face on America’s currency would undermine her legacy. By escaping slavery and helping many others do the same, Tubman became historic for essentially stealing “property.” Her legacy is rooted in resisting the foundation of American capitalism. Tubman didn’t respect America’s economic system, so making her a symbol of it would be insulting.

U.S. capitalism was based on slavery

Steven W. Thrasher 2015 (doctoral candidate in American Studies at New York University and regularly publishes in the New York Times, The Guardian, BuzzFeed News, and The Nation. In June, he will become the inaugural Daniel H. Renberg chair in media coverage of sexual and gender minorities at Northwestern University.) 15 May 2015 “To put Harriet Tubman on the $20 bill would be an insult to her legacy” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/a-slave-abolitionist-has-no-business-being-on-the-20-bill>

The roots of capitalist American slavery are not just found in long shuttered tobacco and cotton plantations, but in the entire business structure of the modern US economy. As historian Greg Grandin [recently wrote](http://www.thenation.com/blog/206025/capitalism-and-slavery): “Banks capitalized the slave trade and insurance companies underwrote it.” And while a still existing company like Aetna insurance was built on insuring slaves’ bodies, it has apologized but [won’t pay reparations](http://www.democracynow.org/2000/3/14/aetna_acknowledges_issuing_slave_policies_during).

Harriet Tubman was bought, sold, and denied wages. How would she feel about being put on money?

Dr. Franco Barchiesi and Sheneese Thompson 2018 (Barchiesi: Department of Comparative Studies and Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ. Was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Univ of the Witwatersrand (S. Africa). PH.D., Sociology. Thompson- PhD Candidate, Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ) “Harriet Tubman and Andrew Jackson on the Twenty-Dollar Bill: A Monstrous Intimacy” 20 November 2018 (brackets in original) <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0038/culture-2018-0038.pdf>

Last, but certainly not least in the repertoire of dilemmas and erasures surrounding and enabling the embrace of Tubman in the nation’s imaginary intimacies, is the question of Tubman’s fugitivity. Over the years, different amounts have been suggested as Tubman’s bounty. Kate Larson writes that “[t]hough a reward notice for Tubman’s capture has yet to be found, it is likely that there was one; whether it was $1,200 or $12,000, Tubman would have been a significant catch for southern bounty hunters” (Larson 191). From the time of her birth (perhaps from the time of her rumoured African grandmother’s capture), Tubman’s life was overdetermined by American money. She was purchased, sold, denied wages for her labour, and money was offered for her recapture or murder. Given the nature of this relationship, one wonders how Tubman might have possibly felt compensated by having her image on American money. Regardless, many of her living descendants (in the broad sense, since she had no children) have determined that this is nothing to celebrate; we are aligned with them.

Turn AFF’s harms/advantages: $20 highlights Tubman’s abuse. Harriet Tubman was underpaid for her services to the Union army. Ironic she would be placed on the $20 since that is the amount by which she was underpaid

Dr. Franco Barchiesi and Sheneese Thompson 2018 (Barchiesi: Department of Comparative Studies and Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ. Was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Univ of the Witwatersrand (S. Africa). PH.D., Sociology. Thompson- PhD Candidate, Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ) “Harriet Tubman and Andrew Jackson on the Twenty-Dollar Bill: A Monstrous Intimacy” 20 November 2018 <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0038/culture-2018-0038.pdf>

Milton C. Sernett (99), for example, details the various appeals made on Tubman’s behalf for her to receive monetary recompense for her military service as a spy and a nurse: “Tubman ended up receiving eight dollars per month as a veteran’s widow and twelve dollars a month for her services as a wartime nurse, plus the compensatory lump sum of about five hundred dollars in October 1895.” Tubman was never granted veteran status or compensation for her military service. There is an additional irony in having her image on the twenty-dollar bill since that was the exact monthly amount she was denied (Paquette). Hartman explains that reparations to the former slaves after the Civil War were pre-empted by the assumption that it was Blacks themselves to be indebted to the Union for their freedom, a “debt” that was not merely symbolic but rather provided justification for the coercive enforcement of labour contracts.

Harriet Tubman fought to free people who were “property” – she wouldn’t want to be on the currency

Feminista Jones 2016 (Philadelphia-based social worker, feminist writer, public speaker, and community activist. She is an award-winning blogger. She sits on the board of the Wayfinder Foundation, a grant-making organization that invests in women making a difference in their underserved communities, and The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.) 21 April 2016 “Keep Harriet Tubman - and All Women - off the $20 Bill” <https://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/36446-keep-harriet-tubman-and-all-women-off-the-20-bill>

Harriet Tubman did not fight for capitalism, free trade, or competitive markets. She repeatedly put herself in the line of fire to free people who were treated as currency themselves. She risked her life to ensure that enslaved black people would know they were worth more than the blood money that exchanged hands to buy and sell them. I do not believe Tubman, who died impoverished in 1913, would accept the “honor,” were it actually bestowed upon her, of having her face on America’s money. And until the economic injustice against women in America ends, no woman should.

Impact: Tubman on the 20 perpetuates racial myths and covers up the real racial issues we need to face up to

Dr. Franco Barchiesi and Sheneese Thompson 2018 (Barchiesi: Department of Comparative Studies and Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ. Was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Univ of the Witwatersrand (S. Africa). PH.D., Sociology. Thompson- PhD Candidate, Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ) “Harriet Tubman and Andrew Jackson on the Twenty-Dollar Bill: A Monstrous Intimacy” 20 November 2018 <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0038/culture-2018-0038.pdf>

Far from repaying the debt owed to Tubman for her military service, the compensatory intentions behind her representation on the bill confirm, in travestied and offensive ways, the unpayability of what is actually due to the enslaved. Again, the United States government finds itself perpetuating a myth of inclusivity that reifies white benevolence while completely excluding the multifaceted ways in which Black people are dehumanised in the process. The myth hides the fact that Blacks must suffer in order for whites to have redemption (Wilderson, Red 259.) Thus, Tubman’s image is appropriated to recreate the very scene of her own subjection to the antiBlackness of the government for which she risked her life, so that America can feel “great again” as it would make money, now with Tubman’s image, available for predatory lending to Black students and prospective homeowners.

3. Dishonors the struggles black women face

Link: Black women face an especially rough economic situation in the U.S. Tubman on the 20 would insult them

Kirsten West Savali 2015 (cultural critic and an associate editor at The Root. She is the recipient of the 2016 Vernon Jarrett Medal for Journalistic Excellence, was named to Ebony magazine’s 2015 “Power 100” list and awarded a 2015 Harry Frank Guggenheim Fellowship.) 13 March 2015 “Why We Should Keep Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks Off the $20 Bill” <https://www.theroot.com/why-we-should-keep-harriet-tubman-and-rosa-parks-off-th-1790859437>

When [nearly half of all single African-American women](http://www.democracynow.org/2010/3/12/study_median_wealth_for_single_black) have zero or negative wealth, and their median wealth is $100—compared with just over $41,000 for single white American women—it is an insult. When black women are the fuel for the prison-industrial complex, with [incarceration rates increasing 800 percent since 1986](http://www.justicestrategies.org/coip/blog/2015/03/women-behind-bar-numbers-abc-news-special-2020-diane-sawyer) and black girls being the [fastest-growing population](http://www.blackyouthproject.com/2012/11/report-black-females-are-fastest-growing-segment-of-juvenile-justice-population/) of a corrupt juvenile-criminal system, it is an insult. When African-American women earn on average [64 cents](http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/african-american-women-wage-gap.pdf) (pdf) for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, compared with the 78 cents that white women earn for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, it is an insult.

Link: Black women are politically underrepresented. Tubman on the 20 would mask racial injustice in this country

Feminista Jones 2016 (Philadelphia-based social worker, feminist writer, public speaker, and community activist. She is an award-winning blogger. She sits on the board of the Wayfinder Foundation, a grant-making organization that invests in women making a difference in their underserved communities, and The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.) 21 April 2016 “Keep Harriet Tubman - and All Women - off the $20 Bill” <https://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/36446-keep-harriet-tubman-and-all-women-off-the-20-bill>

America’s currency is viewed as a place to honor people of historic political influence. To suggest that black women are part of that club by putting Tubman’s face on the $20 simply would cover up our nation’s reality of historic and lingering disenfranchisement. Of the 104 women in the House of Representatives, only 18 are black, and [only one](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_Moseley_Braun) black woman has sat in the U.S. Senate since the nation was founded. Of the 78 women in executive statewide offices, just one is a black woman. There’s no doubt that black women have a political representation problem in America. But putting the face of an admired black American heroine on currency won’t fix it – it will only mask it.

Impact: Insults Tubman’s legacy. Tubman fought to free people, not to represent a system in which they are maligned.

Steven W. Thrasher 2015 (doctoral candidate in American Studies at New York University and regularly publishes in the New York Times, The Guardian, BuzzFeed News, and The Nation. In June, he will become the inaugural Daniel H. Renberg chair in media coverage of sexual and gender minorities at Northwestern Univ.) 15 May 2015 “To put Harriet Tubman on the $20 bill would be an insult to her legacy” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/a-slave-abolitionist-has-no-business-being-on-the-20-bill>

I don’t want to see Tubman commodified with a price, as she once was [as a slave](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/tubman/aa_tubman_youth_1.html). I don’t need to see hers as the face of the US treasury, being passed in transactions to underpaid retail workers and appearing in print ads for transnational banks.

Impact: Distracts from the real issue. These bills will only serve a vehicle for white oppression. Putting someone’s face on a bill will not solve the current problems the U.S. has with racism and discrimination.

**Ethical note: 9 words have been edited out of the last sentence of this card, even though Stoa rules require the entire sentence to be underlined and read. The reason is that it contains a word intended to represent an obscenity. The absence of these 9 words does not change the meaning and the entire sentence is available for anyone who wants to see it.**

Dr. Franco Barchiesi and Sheneese Thompson 2018 (Barchiesi: Department of Comparative Studies and Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ. Was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Univ of the Witwatersrand (S. Africa). PH.D., Sociology. Thompson- PhD Candidate, Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ) “Harriet Tubman and Andrew Jackson on the Twenty-Dollar Bill: A Monstrous Intimacy” 20 November 2018 <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0038/culture-2018-0038.pdf>

As Tubman is being touted as the face of freedom and justice for all, alongside Jackson who believed in the enslavement of Blacks and the extermination of Native Americans, this cultural moment has seen mass incarceration enslave more African Americans than in 1850 (Alexander 180). Bresha Meadows, a fourteen year-old girl, was criminally charged for killing her abusive father and imprisoned in a juvenile detention centre (Jeltsen.) Yet all six police officers involved in the murder of Freddie Gray were acquitted (Stolberg and Bidgood), the case of Walter Scott’s killing by police ended in a mistrial (Berman), and, while Donald Trump and vice-president Mike Pence have praised the civility of Nazis and white supremacists defending Confederate monuments in Charlottesville, the state underwrites societal power to legally, verbally, and physically harm Blacks and other marginalized people. The effect of “monument time” is in all these cases to “freeze” American history in the uneventfulness of white self-congratulation and anti-Black violence. The spectacle of Tubman’s effigy on the bill acts, in relation to this frozen temporality, as an illusory “event” portending as a celebration of freedom what in fact is a civic pageant of diversity and multiculturalism, where Black presences are admitted insofar they serve white ethical dilemmas and suffocate the radicalism of Black voices as well as the plight of Tubman’s descendants. Perhaps most importantly, it does not change anything. “The means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain” (Sharpe, In the Wake 12). Black people (women especially) will still be compensated for their labour inequitably vis-a-vis their white counterparts and will inevitably see less Tubmans, as some hip hop artists—as in John Fuggin Dough’s We Want Them Tubmans (2018)—are already referring to the new bill. Money, then, will still be a site of oppression.

4. Objectifies Black women

The government that used to define Harriet Tubman as property would now hijack her image for the same purpose. This enforces the narrative that Black women are objects, not people.

Dr. Franco Barchiesi and Sheneese Thompson 2018 (Barchiesi: Department of Comparative Studies and Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ. Was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Univ of the Witwatersrand (S. Africa). PH.D., Sociology. Thompson- PhD Candidate, Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ) “Harriet Tubman and Andrew Jackson on the Twenty-Dollar Bill: A Monstrous Intimacy” 20 November 2018 <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0038/culture-2018-0038.pdf>

We assess the twenty-dollar bill as spectacle, the staging of a performance and narrative through which the image of Tubman as a Black woman is required to do rhetorical labour for the sustenance of anti-Black civil discourse translated into institutional dilemmas. Therefore, we would rather start by suggesting that the affair is, in fact, a “non-event” (Hartman, Scenes) existing in a paradigmatic mode of temporal “freezing” in which gestures aiming at closure and resolution inescapably return to the scene of Black captivity (Murillo). Resolution is, in particular, impossible as a dialectical recomposition of equilibrium based on restoring the integrity of workers and women, which is what Thrasher aspires to. The very State that prints currency and underwrites its value also defined Tubman as a socially dead yet sentient object of property, gratuitous violence, and sexual terror, hence “neither a worker nor a woman” (Wilderson, “Afro-Pessimism”). Rather than the limitations of an empty symbolic gesture (placing her portrait on the bill) as the incomplete “recognition” of Tubman’s status or contribution to the making of the Nation, at stake here is how the nation itself makes and remakes Black female flesh accessible as inert matter in circuits of appropriation, violence, and representation that sustain America’s political and libidinal economy. The question is then not one of delayed recognition, but rather of continuing structural fungibility—which Saidiya Hartman (Scenes 21) defines as “the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity”—of Black women. Since fungibility implies the unlimited possibility of forceful practical or imaginative access to Black being turned into a “thing,” it is also a non-relational category, for objects cannot have a relation with subjects. As such, the register of fungibility renders both recognition and the symbolic inadequate notions for a critical analysis of Tubman’s imaginative conscription in national representation.

It’s a trap: The government would use this measure to distract from the real issues about the way black women are treated. It’s a gesture to placate those who support “multiculturalism,” and makes black womanhood nameless

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The story of the death and rebirth of the twenty-dollar bill—whose agency as a thing, an inert object, is made to far outstrip Tubman’s or the radical politics she stood for—is not about misrecognition and inadequate reward, or iconographic celebration sans practical reparation. It rather speaks to the powerfully material effects of reinventing America’s “arsenal of raciality,” the term with which Denise Ferreira Da Silva (Toward) characterizes the adaptability of anti-blackness, across time and space, from bygone scientific racism to the contemporary discourses of the “national” and the (multi-) “cultural” in neoliberal and post-civil rights contexts. The conjuring of Tubman’s ghost at a time when the state aims to obscure anti-Black violence and defuse its antagonisms under the pageantries of a “post-racial” America gives new flesh to a long-established rhetorical patrimony, which places Black femaleness as its invisible yet irreplaceable core. Tubman’s name is then a secondary signifier of forces that made Black womanhood nameless, recalling Hortense Spillers’ (203) reflections on the “mark”:  
Let’s face it. I am marked woman, but not everybody knows my name… I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not there, I would have to be invented.

Black women have been historically maligned

Sierra Mannie 2015 (freelance writer. She was previously an education reporting fellow for the Hechinger Report and the Jackson Free Press. 2016 graduate of Univ of Mississippi with a BA in Classical Studies. Her past work has been featured at publications such as TIME.com, QZ.com and the Daily Mississippian) 13 May 2015 “Harriet Tubman On the $20 Bill Is Chump Change” <https://time.com/3857367/harriettubman-20-bill-underground-railroad/>

Black women — from slaves to First Ladies — have served and suffered for as long as we have existed in this country, in every imaginable way. But despite the centuries of black female triumph as we toil through merely living in this unfriendly nation, built on our backs, the rest of the world gets to pick and choose whether or not we’re worthy of acknowledgement. We are either muted, the unseen, or blaring, painful to the senses. And the strident force in blocking us out is pervasive. Black men killed by the police get widespread media attention, for better or worse; we cannot say the same of the very many women [brutalized or killed by law enforcement](http://www.bustle.com/articles/52433-police-kill-black-women-all-the-time-too-we-just-dont-hear-about-it), or of the [black trans women murdered](http://janetmock.com/2015/02/16/six-trans-women-killed-this-year/)at alarming rates. The leech of poverty, existing at the crossroads of capitalism and racism, [disproportionately affects](http://talkpoverty.org/basics/) women of all races, but especially black people.

Impact: Money becomes a vehicle of “terror”

Dr. Franco Barchiesi and Sheneese Thompson 2018 (Barchiesi: Department of Comparative Studies and Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ. Was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Univ of the Witwatersrand (S. Africa). PH.D., Sociology. Thompson- PhD Candidate, Department of African American and African Studies, Ohio State Univ) “Harriet Tubman and Andrew Jackson on the Twenty-Dollar Bill: A Monstrous Intimacy” 20 November 2018 <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/culture.2018.2.issue-1/culture-2018-0038/culture-2018-0038.pdf>

Tubman’s troubled relationship with money as a conveyor of national imagination points at a reckoning both with the role of economics in Black oppression and its articulation with forces that make Black lives disposable and endangered. While it is clear that the wealth gap between Blacks and whites cannot easily be closed, since the bulk of the wealth amassed by white families came from the coerced labour of Blacks, there is something a bit more profound about the “grinding down of poverty—the poverty of the work-too-hard-and-still-can’t-make-ends-meet kind,” that far too many Black people experience (Sharpe, In the Wake 8). Christina Sharpe opens her path-breaking In the Wake with a personal description of tending to her ailing brother as a call to the ethical demands of “wake work” for the too many Black people who have a brother, an uncle, a father, or a mother, a sister, a son, a daughter, or a cousin who have been worn down by premature deaths as well as economic oppression. Like the other forms of oppression mentioned here, an erasure occurs around why white households’ wealth is sixteen times that of Black ones (Shin). Racially segregated homeownership, education and labour markets are usually mentioned as causes of this gap. As Sharpe mentions, this simultaneous (economic) terror and erasure of that terror, wears on the physical body, not just because Black people are more likely to be physically overworked and underpaid, but because economic forces are integral to the “skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment,” which for Hartman (Lose 6) mark the “afterlife of slavery.” Consequently, money should be read as a site of terror for Black people in the historical and the contemporary sense. Not only does Tubman’s image on money reify Black bondage, but naturalises it through the symbolic and optimistic coupling with its perpetrators. Pairing this already loaded appropriation of Tubman’s image and memory with that of Andrew Jackson on the twenty-dollar bill simply makes this scene of subjection all the more spectacular

Case turn: The men on the money are a reminder of what needs to be done

Steven W. Thrasher 2015 (doctoral candidate in American Studies at New York Univ and regularly publishes in the New York Times, The Guardian, BuzzFeed News, and The Nation. In June, he will become the inaugural Daniel H. Renberg chair in media coverage of sexual and gender minorities at Northwestern Univ.) 15 May 2015 “To put Harriet Tubman on the $20 bill would be an insult to her legacy” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/15/a-slave-abolitionist-has-no-business-being-on-the-20-bill>

But Tubman wasn’t a sentimentalist, or an incrementalist. She was an abolitionist. Until they’re willing to talk reparations, leave the white guys on the money as a reminder that they created a national economy where men still get paid more than women and Tubman’s black and brown descendant daughters are hit the worst.

A/T “The poll” – Narrows the focus on Black women so much that it erases their experiences

Kirsten West Savali 2015 (cultural critic and an associate editor at The Root. She is the recipient of the 2016 Vernon Jarrett Medal for Journalistic Excellence, was named to Ebony magazine’s 2015 “Power 100”) 13 March 2015 “Why We Should Keep Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks Off the $20 Bill” <https://www.theroot.com/why-we-should-keep-harriet-tubman-and-rosa-parks-off-th-1790859437>

Although I’m sure that [Women on 20s](http://www.womenon20s.org/our_team) and its approximately 256,000 voters mean well, the very narrow lens through which they appear to view gender equality and sociopolitical progress leaves very little room for the lived experiences of black women throughout America’s history and into the present day; in fact, it erases them.

A/T “Puts a woman on U.S. currency” – This cannot be viewed as a gender issue. Black women have a distinct history from white women.

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This account from The New York Times makes the controversy about Tubman’s monetary representation completely about gender, eluding the apparent issues of race and enslavement as pertaining to the legacy of Tubman, a Black woman. This kind of erasure is not unusual for white women’s discourses on gender that appropriate the struggles of Black women as a useful analogy. Black women’s—and womanist—indictments of such machinations have crucially verged on attempts at reclaiming Tubman, for example in the name itself of the Combahee River Collective, not as a feminist icon, but as a revolutionary operating within the incomparable and inextricable conjunction of enslavement and sexual violence that defines the paradigm of Black women’s existence outside and beyond the boundaries of gender oppression (James). Yet the erasure of Blackness by virtue of a gendered politics of claims was as true when Tubman found herself lobbying for suffrage, as it is when white women voted decisively for Donald Trump in the 2016 election. This makes the commentary of Susan Ades Stone, executive director of Women on 20s, that “[i]t would be a slap in the face of women to reverse the decision [following Trump’s election]” (cit. in Rhodan) all the more problematic. While white women may, in fact, be victims of abuse by their fathers and husbands, and make strong cases against patriarchy, those cases rest on the political capacity they have demanded on the basis of not being Black (Broeck). Gender fails, historically and contemporarily, as a unifying force for Black (and other women of colour) and white women.

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