

God, Life, and Everything Eleanor and The \$10 Bill

The votes are in and it looks like Eleanor Roosevelt might just be the winner. I am speaking of the new \$10 bill design which is supposed to have a woman on it.

I hate it.

Now don't get me wrong. I love Eleanor Roosevelt and feels she's worthy. There's a movement in the Episcopal Church, of which she was a lifelong member, to honor her with a "Feast Day." In the church, a feast day is a day on the church's calendar when we offer special worship to honor a person whose life was exemplary in spreading the Good News of Christ. It is usually on or near the day of their death - or as we put it, on the day of their entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Eleanor Roosevelt certainly is worthy of emulating, and her entire life was one of self-offering in a way that few of her time and social class ever saw. She fought for civil rights for African Americans, for women, for the poor and for the disenfranchised. She took seriously the old Gospel saying: "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

But I still don't like her being on the \$10 bill.

Here are three reasons:

1) It's not the \$10 bill that should be changed, but the \$20. The group *Women On 20s*, the group that got this campaign started in the first place, recently put out a statement that they were surprised and disappointed by Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew's announcement of which bill would be changed. Here's why:

Alexander Hamilton was the person most singularly responsible for a central national bank, the precursor of the Federal Reserve. In contrast, Andrew Jackson, who resides on the \$20, opposed any sort of central bank as well as paper currency in general and vetoed a renewal of its charter. Economic uncertainty, if not chaos, ensued.

More importantly, Alexander Hamilton was one of the "Founding Fathers." He was a major general during the Revolution, helped create the constitution, and served as the first Secretary of the Treasury of the United States. On top of that, he was a key founder of the United States Coast Guard and was an ardent opponent of slavery, working to end the slave trade both in New York and nationwide.

Andrew Jackson, to be sure, was a successful general, too. And a brutal one. He invaded Florida without presidential warrant (though some say the president gave him sufficiently vague orders to justify invasion), he slaughtered Native Americans without remorse, and he was the author of the genocidal Trail of Tears. Oh, and he owned lots of slaves.

Yet for some reason, the original movement to remove Jackson in favor of a woman was turned on its head. If current policy stands, he will remain on the \$20 while Hamilton will cede his spot to a woman. If we want our monetary honorees to say something about our nation, what does this choice say?

2) If I were a woman, I would be furious not only because the movement to replace an unworthy man with a worthy woman was hijacked but because whatever woman is chosen won't even get the bill to herself. According to the latest proposals, Alexander Hamilton will share space with Eleanor Roosevelt (or whatever woman is ultimately decided upon). Talk about a slap in the face. It's like saying, "We'll let you

have a little recognition, but not too much. But then, you don't really need as much as a man, do you?" Come on. If you're going to put someone on, then do it.

This move to share the bill is supposed to appease those who are angry that Hamilton was chosen to be replaced rather than Jackson. What this does, however, is diminish Hamilton *and* women in this country.

3) Eleanor doesn't really need to be on currency. Sure, she's worthy. And in a recent poll, she was most favored among respondents. But I can think of at least a couple of reasons to pick another woman. First, there's already a Roosevelt on currency. Granted, it's a dime, but it is iconic. If you wanted to have a shared image, the dime would be perfect, with both Franklin and Eleanor together. They were, after all, a *tour du force* of a team, the likes of which this country has never seen.

Second, there are so many worthy women in this country. Harriet Tubman actually won a competition for who should be on the \$20 (when everyone thought Jackson would be replaced). She certainly has everything that Americans want to strive for. She escaped to freedom, returned to the south and danger to lead countless other slaves to freedom, then helped lead Union troops during the Civil War, making her the first American woman to actually command a military expedition.

Third, Eleanor would agree that she came from the ruling class of her day. She was white, wealthy and privileged. To her credit, she used what she had for the betterment of humanity. But so did others, and I can't help thinking she would prefer to see Harriet Tubman grace the \$20 bill.

So yes, I think there needs to be a face change on our currency. It just doesn't need to be Eleanor Roosevelt, and it doesn't need to be the \$10 bill.