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Treasury Failed To Do their Job and George Floyd Paid the Price

Women On 20s and associates are calling on the U.S. Treasury to take a knee and make our \$20s counterfeit proof and upgrade it with a portrait of Harriet Tubman. The Treasury's failure to update the \$20 cannot be separated from the tragic events which led to the murder of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020.

After burying his brother on Tuesday, Philonise Floyd went to Washington to testify in front of House members this week. He grimly noted his brother "didn't deserve to die over \$20." Certainly not, but the grievous truth about American history is how little people of color and women have been valued by those in power. And it is an ironic truth that the person on the \$20, the bill that started this tragedy on May 25th, is someone who clearly did not value black or Native American lives at all.

For decades, people have asked for the removal of Andrew Jackson from our \$20s, an exceedingly cruel slave trader, slaveowner, and the architect of the "Trail of Tears" genocide of Native Americans. Jackson's brutal track record would seem to be at complete odds with the values Americans say they have, yet his name and personage infiltrate our lives daily making it impossible to extract ourselves from Jackson's brutality. Jackson's portrait on our currency glorifies a rogue, a thug, and a murderer. If that is who we were, and he was a product of his time, Treasury must renounce that identity and help transform who we are going forward.

We mistakenly thought when we got Treasury Secretary Jack Lew to declare in April 2016 that Jackson would be replaced with Harriet Tubman on our \$20 currency, we were beginning a part of that long needed transformation. There was a palpable bipartisan elation upon the announcement. Many Republicans were more than happy to see the Jackson era gone recognizing the harm he did and continues to inflict. Our current President, however, could not bear this change to the \$20, it seems. One of his first acts in office was to drag Jackson's portrait out of the basement and place it in the Oval Office.

And Treasury and the current administration have done more harm than break the promise to have Tubman on our \$20s. They have created a national security risk and a real threat to people who might get fake \$20s. Treasury's failure to make it sufficiently difficult for the counterfeiters to make phony bills is inexcusable. Treasury had a principle to update bills every 7-10 years to stay ahead of counterfeiters, yet the \$20 has not been upgraded since 2003. The U.S. Secret Service, part of the Treasury department, has also failed to do its job of tracking counterfeit bills and stopping the counterfeiting rings which leads to the local police aggressively attacking innocent citizens.

The failure of the Treasury and the Secret Service, to do their jobs set George Floyd up and sets up many like him. A fake \$20 bill that should not have been on the streets, is another painful element to the

tragedy which unfolded on May 25th when George Floyd was murdered. If the money were changed in its format and style and fakes duly rounded up, Mr. Floyd would not have had this terrible encounter. Although most bills have a limited life span, our system also fails to thwart counterfeiting because all older versions of currency are accepted instead of rounding up all out of date bills and replacing them.

The owner of the Cup Foods store says that he did not think that Mr. Floyd knew that the \$20 was a counterfeit, meaning Mr. Floyd did not know why the police were there. Of course, for Black Americans, knowing why the police are trying to arrest you is typically a great mystery and power play. Mr. Floyd tried the nonresistance route to save his life, but it did not help as Derek Chauvin casually pushed every breath out of him, despite others in the crowd calling out the inhumanity and insanity of it.

Last May, the current Treasury Secretary, Steve Mnuchin, told Congresswoman Ayana Pressley and the American public the reason they haven't produced a new \$20 bearing the likeness of Harriet Tubman is because of the technical requirements needed to deter counterfeiters. The assertion that the level of technical difficulty will take more than 20 years to revise the \$20 is ludicrous when we compare it to what is accomplished in everyday rocket science or medicine. It also is counter to traditional practices of the Treasury of regularly updating our currency. We have always said it was a matter of political will, not know how, and we know that the last administration had taken this well down the path of development.

The \$20 is the most used bill and the most counterfeited bill in the U.S. And the U.S. is a step behind the rest of the world in its currency design. The rest of the world has long moved onto using polymer based currency which is more difficult to counterfeit. The rest of the world has long moved onto featuring people and symbols which are more inclusive and representative of a world we want to have. The rest of the world has long moved onto having tactile features or different size bills so visually challenged people can know what denomination they are holding. Most countries have proven that it does not take decades or anything like rocket science, to make these vital changes.

By failing to update the currency, Treasury endangers its citizens on many levels. It endangers people like George Floyd who have received a fake \$20 unwittingly. It can damage our economy with excess fake bills that will not be accepted commercially. And it jeopardizes the safety and security of the visually impaired who must ask others what bills they have in their hands or force them to rely on a third party app or loud currency reader in public, which is not considered meaningful access.

The American Council for the Blind sued the Treasury in 2002, after decades of failed negotiations over adding tactile features to the currency. After a six year court battle, the ACB won in 2008. The court ordered that in the next generation of currency, which was anticipated to be by December 2020, a tactile feature had to also be included. Nevertheless, 12 years after that case was won, the Treasury has still not implemented the changes and is coming up with more reasons it cannot provide a tactile feature. This failure and disregard of a court order puts the visually impaired at risk for unnecessary exposure to theft and humiliation.

Treasury and the Secret service must answer for their dangerous foot dragging on updating our currency. They need to take a knee for George Floyd. They were also supposed to change the \$10 and \$5 by adding other American heroes, such as Martin Luther King, Marion Anderson, and Sojourner Truth, but because they could not bring themselves to make these important symbolic changes either,

they have created a multi layered national security risk, and continue to poison psyches with false narratives.

Would a Tubman \$20 or other bills with a more inclusive pantheon create racial healing and equity? No single step can possibly undo centuries of injustice, but at least a change like this in our currency would improve safety for citizens, promote the contributions of African Americans and women to society, and ensure that visually disabled Americans can easily use cash. Most importantly, such changes will acknowledge the true history of this country, as a step towards truth and reconciliation, and towards long overdue reparations.

Treasury take a knee. Make our currency counterfeit proof. Create tactile features.

#Symbols Matter Tubman 20s now.

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