

## The Case for MLK on the 20 – and Jackson Off It

Nobody doubts that Martin Luther King was one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century and one of the greatest Americans ever. Shouldn't we honor him by putting his image on our currency?



Our money isn't reserved for past presidents: Ben Franklin is on the one hundred dollar bill.

Nor is it reserved to men: Susan B. Anthony is on a one-dollar coin.

Nor is it even reserved for whites: the U.S. Treasury recently put Sacagawea, an Indian guide to Lewis and Clark, on a one dollar gold coin.

King deserves more than to be put on an odd-shaped one-dollar coin that is rarely used. He deserves to be put on a bill. While looking for a place for King we asked ourselves, who should King replace?

Though he was never president, Ben Franklin (\$100) was involved in nearly every significant event of the American Revolution, from the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution. He was also one of the greatest inventors of the 18th Century. There's no question that he should stay on the one-hundred dollar bill.

George Washington (\$1) was the father of the country. Jefferson (\$2) was the author of the Declaration of Independence and a founding father. Lincoln (\$5) held the country together through civil war and is widely considered our greatest president. Hamilton (\$10) was a great revolutionary. Grant (\$50) was a great general – without him Lincoln could not have held the union together (or freed the slaves).

All of this leaves us with Andrew Jackson. The facts are these: Jackson came to power by forcing the Creek, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokee and Seminole Indians from their lands so that slave plantations could be built.

It gets worse. Consider the following:

- Jackson first became known among the American people for killing Creek women, men and children indiscriminately.
- As treaty commissioner Jackson took away half of the land of the Creek in the largest Southern Indian land grab so it could be used for slave plantations.
- Jackson justified his 1818 razing of Seminole villages as his way of hunting down escaped slaves in Florida (bought from Spain in 1819 after Jackson's military campaign).
- President Jackson's Indian Removal bill forced 70,000 Indians west of the Mississippi and was responsible for the "Trail of Tears" which where 4,000 Cherokee men, women and children died.
- Jackson's grand vision of Indian Removal was to "place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters... [and cause the Indians] to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community."

There was nothing inevitable about Jackson and what he did. He overcame stiff opposition to his anti-Indian and pro-slavery policies. The Supreme Court even declared Jackson's Indian Removal Act illegal. After Chief Justice John Marshall handed down the decision Jackson disobeyed it and violated the constitution. He said, "John Marshall has made his decision. Now let him enforce it."

Jackson's opponent for the presidency, Senator Henry Clay, opposed the Indian Removal Act, which just barely passed the House and Senate.

In the Indian Removal debate, Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen said, "We have crowded the tribes upon a few miserable acres on our southern frontier; it is all that is left to them of their once boundless forest; and still, like the horse-leech, our insatiated cupidity cries, give! Give!... Sir... Do the obligations of justice change with the color of the skin?"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the rugged individualist of such essays as "On Self-Reliance," would have led the charge to remove Andrew Jackson from the twenty because of the Indian Removal Act. In an open letter to Jackson's vice president, Martin Van Buren, Emerson wrote:

"The soul of man, the justice, the mercy that is the heart's heart in all men, from Maine to Georgia, does abhor this business... a crime is projected that confounds our understandings by its magnitude, a crime that really deprives us as well as the Cherokees of a country for how could we call the conspiracy that should crush these poor Indians our government, or the land that was cursed by their parting and dying imprecations our country any more? You sir, will bring down that renowned chair in which you sit into infamy if your seal is set to this instrument of perfidy; and the name of this nation, hitherto the sweet omen of religion and liberty, will stink to this world."

If Jackson still merits representation on American money then let him grace the tail side of the one-dollar coin of Indian scout Sacagawea.