

OPINION

Keep Grant on the \$50 Bill

Reagan doesn't compare

BY DONALD KAUL

There's yet another movement afoot to put Ronald Reagan's face on the \$50 bill, replacing that of Ulysses S. Grant. A number of Republicans in Congress have been beating the drums in support of the idea.



"One decade into the 21st century, it's time to honor the last great president of the 20th and give President Reagan a place beside Presidents Roosevelt and Kennedy," said Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C.

There are several things wrong with this idea:

Ronald Reagan already has his name on Washington's National Airport, as well as an enormous federal office building in the capital. In addition, there's some nut-a former congressman, I think--who has made it his life mission to get Reagan's name on some monument or public facility in every county in the United States. That's enough honor for anyone.

Not only was Mr. Reagan not "the last great president of the 20th century," he wasn't great at all. Not even very good. More on that later.

Taking Grant off the \$50 bill would be yet another insult to a great American hero who has been unjustly maligned through the years.

Grant was perhaps the greatest Union general of the Civil War. Lincoln had been saddled with inept and ineffective generals who were outmaneuvered by the lesser-equipped Southerners at every turn--until Grant showed up. His victory at Vicksburg (along with Robert E. Lee's virtually simultaneous defeat at Gettysburg) sealed the Confederacy's fate.

As historian Sean Wilentz pointed out recently in The New York Times, Grant as president became a great champion of civil rights, not only for freed slaves but for Native Americans. It was he who ended the reign of terror that the Ku Klux Klan visited upon the South after the war.

He also achieved ratification of the 15th Amendment, which banned disenfranchisement on the basis of race, as well as passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which prohibited racial discrimination in all public accommodations.

For that he was vilified by historians who felt that the wrong side had won the Civil War.

His presidency was eventually brought low by corrupt advisers and his naïve trust in them. Most of his legislative achievements were wiped away.

Still, compared to Reagan he was a giant.

The late Alexander Haig, Reagan's first Secretary of State, had this to say about his old boss:

"Reagan was a cipher."

According to Haig, James Baker, Edwin Meese, and Michael Deaver were the ones who ran the show. Haig even dismissed the foreign policy triumphs that Reaganites love to celebrate. Reagan, he said, had "the good fortune of having been president when the Evil Empire began to unravel, but to consider that standing tall in Grenada or building Star Wars brought the Evil Empire to its knees is a distortion of historic reality. The internal contradictions of Marxism brought it to its knees."

What Reagan brought to the presidency was the realization that you didn't have to be a good president so long as you could act like one. He hadn't been all that good an actor in the movies, but as president he found the role of his life.

He looked like a president and he talked like one (if you didn't pay attention to content, which few did). He was also had the good fortune early in his first term to be shot in a bizarre assassination attempt by a disgruntled Jodie Foster fan.

It was a very serious wound and Reagan played the scene perfectly, as Jimmy Stewart might have.

"I hope you're all Republicans," he is said to have told the doctors as they wheeled him into the operating room. And he may actually have said it. In any case, the story won our hearts. Some of them.

Not mine.

Minuteman Media columnist Donald Kaul lives in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Letter to the Editor

Portland can learn from other Cops

Several weeks ago Forest Grove police officers successfully subdued a man in the street with a gun, waving and yelling at a police officer-- a potential "suicide by cop" situation.

The entire event was over in two hours.

Apparently the police there don't feel threatened by an armed- not to mention unarmed- citizen.

Why don't we then try a real easy solution? Instead of Portland's meetings, marches, and

newly formed organizations which, while well-meaning, effect little real or timely change to police behavior, let's get the Portland police to meet with the Forest Grove police and let them tell them how they de-escalated a tense situation- a man with a gun- without any loss of life.

Maybe our police could learn something. One can always hope.

Linda S. Kanzinger
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