

OPINION

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Insist on Harriet Tubman for \$20 Bill

Currency should reflect on all of us

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Every day I wear a pair of medallions around my neck with portraits of two of my role models: Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. As a child I read books about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. She and the indomitable and eloquent Sojourner Truth represent countless anonymous slave women whose bodies and minds were abused and whose voices were muted by slavery, Jim Crow, segregation and sexism throughout our nation's history.

Although Harriet Tubman could not read books, she could read the stars to find her way north to freedom. And she freed not only herself from slavery but returned to slave country again and again across forests, streams and mountains to lead other slaves to freedom at great personal danger. She was tough. She was determined. She was fearless. She was shrewd and she trusted God completely to deliver her and other fleeing slaves from pursuing captors who had placed a bounty on her life.

In April 2016, the Obama Administration Treasury Department under then-Secretary Jacob Lew announced that Harriet Tubman's face would grace the front of the redesigned \$20 bill, making her the first woman in more than a century and first African American ever to be represented on the face of an American paper note.

But President Trump said he was opposed to the idea of honoring Harriet Tubman that way before he even took office, and three years after the initial announcement, current Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin has since said that under the



Trump Administration the Treasury Department is unsure when or whether that change will still happen.

Now a bipartisan pair of House members, Elijah Cummings, D-Md., and John Katko, R-N.Y., has re-introduced the Harriet Tubman Tribute Act of 2019 (H.R. 1083) to require the Treasury Department to put Tubman on the \$20 bill.

We must follow through and insist that as our nation prepares to

ice Paul, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott would be featured on the back of the \$10 bill. It also said great contralto and opera singer Marian Anderson, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would be featured on the back of the \$5 bill, honoring Marian Anderson's concert and Dr. King's March on Washington as groundbreaking events at the Lincoln Memorial that helped shape our democracy.

It was 80 years ago on Easter Sunday

warriors who expanded the civil and human rights of women, people of color and all of us, and would now be featured on the bills we use every day.

Former Secretary Lew said he had an 'aha' moment about how important these changes were after recognizing the groundswell of public response to his announcement that the Treasury Department was considering changing the design of the currency. To so many people these new bills will be much more than pieces of paper. For too long and for too many money has been the most powerful symbol of what we value as a nation. Making these leaders and s/heroes among the faces of America by placing them on our currency will send powerful messages about what—and who—we Americans are, value, and strive to become.

The new bills also will teach our children and grandchildren and remind all Americans that Black history and women's history are American history. It is so important to make sure all of our children can see themselves and their ancestors pictured on something as basic as the money used every day by millions and this will deepen the meaning of how we define success in America.

Now it's time for the Treasury Department to finish the job of paying tribute and public homage to Harriet Tubman and honoring these other great women and Dr. King who died seeking to redeem the soul of America. They never stopped demanding that we live up to our declared creeds of freedom, life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and equality for all. Please tell your Members of Congress today that you support the bipartisan efforts to insist that this change happens right now!

Marian Wright Edelman is founder and president emerita of the Children's Defense Fund.

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celebrate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in 2020 we will be able to celebrate with redesigned American currency that reflects all of us.

When Secretary Lew originally announced this bill honoring Harriet Tubman I celebrated with deep joy and noted that she would not be alone. The Treasury Department also announced that Sojourner Truth and women suffragette activists and leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Al-

1939 that Eleanor Roosevelt arranged for Marian Anderson, for whom I am named and about whom great conductor Arturo Toscanini said "yours is a voice such as one hears once in a hundred years," to perform at the Lincoln Memorial before a crowd of 75,000 after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to let her sing at Constitution Hall because she was black. These additions would round out the inspiring group of determined moral

A Revolutionary Idea to Close the Wealth Divide

Investing in baby bonds for the future

BY JESSICAH PIERRE

The gap between America's ultra-wealthy and the rest of us is growing dramatically as wealth continues to concentrate at the top at the expense of the rest of us. One major symptom of this economic rift is the racial wealth divide, which is greater today than it was nearly four decades ago.

The median Black family today owns \$3,600 — just 2 percent of the \$147,000 of wealth

the median white family owns. At the extreme top, the Forbes 400 richest Americans own more wealth than all Black households, plus a quarter of Latinx households, combined.

When analyzing the racial wealth divide, it's important to note that this is a systemic issue — a result of policies, not individual behavior.

Darrick Hamilton, the executive director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State, emphasizes that the key ingredient of how successful you'll be in America isn't how hard you work individually — it's how wealthy your family is.

For instance, the racial wealth gap continues to grow despite

rising rates of Black employment and education. These other things simply can't make up for enormous, systemic disparities in family wealth.

Hamilton's proposed solution? "Baby bonds."

Baby bonds are federally managed accounts set up at birth for children and endowed by the government with assets that will grow over time. Neither the child nor their parents would be able to access these funds until the child reaches adulthood, at which point they could use the money to get an education, purchase a home, or start a business.

Baby bonds could play an essential role in balancing the historical injustices that created the racial wealth divide.

One recent study shows a baby

bond program has the potential to reduce the current black-white wealth divide more than tenfold. Another shows that had a baby bond program been initiated 40 years ago, the Latinx-white wealth divide would be closed by now — and the black-white wealth divide would have shrunk by 82 percent.

Baby bonds are an essential, universal, race-conscious program to provide everyone with an opportunity to start life off secure, irrespective of their race and the financial position in which they're born.

And they're just one of 10 bold solutions offered in a new Institute for Policy Studies report on closing the racial wealth divide, which counts Hamilton among its coauthors.

"Large scale policy change," it concludes, "is the most promising path to addressing the racial wealth divide and many asset poor whites as well." The report also recommends solutions ranging from Medicare for All and higher taxes on the wealthy to setting up a congressional committee to study reparations.

Just like all other issues of inequality in America, the racial wealth divide is a structural problem that requires structural solutions. In order to create economic prosperity for every American, we must start with taking bold action to close the racial wealth divide once and for all.

Jessica Pierre is the inequality media specialist at the Institute for Policy Studies.

