

## **American History on a Dollar Bill**

For July 4, take out a dollar bill at breakfast or at dinner time! Gather the children around for a fascinating lesson in the meaning of who America is! The flip side of the dollar bill is a trove of symbolism and patriotism that every one of every age will find interesting and unforgettable. It is the front and back sides of the Great Seal of the United States. At first glance you will see a pyramid on your left and an eagle on your right.

Literally on July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams to design an official seal for the new nation they hoped to create. On June 13, 1782, after six years and three committees later, these historical figures finalized the present Great Seal displayed on the back of every one dollar bill. The designer was Charles Thompson, a fifty-three year old Latin master. On September 15, 1789, the United States Congress ordered “that the seal heretofore used by the United States in Congress assembled, shall be, and hereby is declared to be, the seal of the United States of America.”

However, it was not until 1934 that the back of the dollar bill displayed the Great Seal. As the country was coming out of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Americans to turn in all of their gold coinage and move to paper money. The first current dollar bill design was printed in 1935. The artist had the eagle on the left and the pyramid on the right, but the president himself arranged it as it is today.

**Pull out a one dollar bill. Now, look closely to the front side with the Great Seal on your right.**

The crest is a brilliant cloud of glory, out of which is bursting a constellation of thirteen stars on a blue sky which represents the thirteen original colonies. The eagle’s wings are outstretched and displayed with wingtips up. In its beak, the eagle holds a scroll with the words “E pluribus unum.” (*Out of the many, one.*)

The eagle head is the executive branch of the proposed government—the President. The chief of the shield is blue, representing Congress which is elected by the states which are shown as thirteen vertical stripes. (*Contrary to the stripes on the flag, the outer stripes are white*). The tail of the eagle has nine feathers representing the nine justices of the Supreme Court.

In its right talon is an olive branch, and in its left talon is a quiver of 13 arrows. This signifies to all other nations that this new nation has “a strong desire for peace but will always be ready for war if threatened.” This is highlighted by the eagle’s head which is turned toward the olive branch.

When he saw the design that he had requested for the dollar bill, President Roosevelt decided to place the eagle on the right. Under the left design, he sketched in the words, “The Great Seal” and on the right, “of the United States.” The words “IN GOD WE TRUST” were added in 1956.

**Flip your one dollar over and study the back side of your bill:**

The pyramid, inspired by the Egyptian pyramids symbolizes both strength and duration. There are thirteen tiers of blocks, symbolizing the thirteen original colonies. In Roman numerals MDCCLXXVI the year 1776 is spelled out. Underneath is a scroll quoting Virgil: *Novus ordo seclorum*, Latin for “new order of the ages” which commenced from that date. Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address, alluded to this with his words, “...our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” That was, and this dollar is a *Novus ordo seclorum*. The word “seclorum” does not, as some insist, mean “secular” at all, but is the possessive form of the word “sæculum,” meaning “ages.”

Over the pyramid is an eye within a triangle. It is the clearest, unequivocal, reference to religious faith in any official United States symbol. It was a common motif found in Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christian art in the eighteenth century, and clearly symbolized the Holy Trinity and God’s omniscient eye surrounded by rays of light denoting God’s glory. Lest one miss the point, the Latin inscription, *Annuït coeptis* is a caption meaning, “Providence approves our undertaking.” One can be assured that in 1782, the men of the Continental Congress were fully cognizant of the meaning of the “Eye of Providence.”

At a Flag Day ceremony in 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower expressed why he wanted to include “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance: “In this way we are affirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource in peace and in war.” **Then in 1956 the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress adopted a bill to place the words, “IN GOD WE TRUST” in all capital letters on every denomination of United States currency—coins and paper money.** President Eisenhower signed the bill into law on July 30, 1956, making it the nation’s official motto. While Jeb Bush was governor of Florida, “In God We Trust” became the official motto of that state. The phrase now appears on the automobile license plates of North Carolina, Indiana, South Carolina, and Ohio and can be ordered as a “specialty plate” in fourteen other states.

Respectfully submitted,

Donald W. Haynes

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