

1/25/2026

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THE STORY OF US CURRENCY

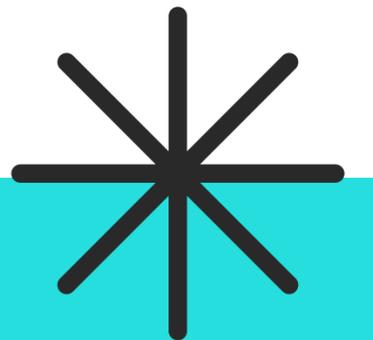
History, Symbols, and Significance



1/25/2026

AGENDA

1. Origins and Early History
2. Civil War to United States Notes
3. Symbols, Portraits, and Legacy



ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY



INTRODUCTION TO US CURRENCY

Roots in Spanish Silver Dollar

The 8 reales coin shaped the first US dollar's design.

Currency Nicknames and Identity

Terms like 'greenbacks' and 'sawbuck' reflect American culture.

Symbols of Liberty and Unity

Coins feature ancient symbols like the Liberty Cap and Union Shield.

Economic Impact and Continuity

US currency has financed wars and supported national growth.

SPANISH SILVER DOLLAR ROOTS



Spanish Silver Dollar Dominance

Served as legal tender in the US during the 1790s



Foundation for US Dollar

Influenced weight and silver content of first US coins



Birth of the 'Quarter'

Spanish dollar divided into 8 bits; US issued 25¢ coin for change

ICONIC NICKNAMES AND SLANG

American Slang: Sawbuck & Buck

- 'Sawbuck' for \$10 comes from the Roman numeral X on bills.
- 'Buck' for \$1 first appeared in print in 1856.

Canadian Icons: Loonie & Toonie

- Loonie (\$1) and Toonie (\$2) coins replaced paper bills.
- Names quickly became symbols of Canadian currency.

British Currency Nicknames

- 'Quid' for pound, 'bob' for shilling, 'tanner' for sixpence.

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CIVIL WAR TO UNITED STATES NOTES



CIVIL WAR AND GREENBACKS

Financing the Civil War

Congress authorized Demand Notes to fund the war effort.

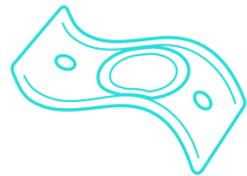
Birth of the 'Greenback'

Notes earned the nickname for their distinctive green ink.

Enduring Value

All US currency issued since 1861 remains valid today.

UNITED STATES NOTES ERA



Birth of United States Notes

Congress authorized a new class of currency in the 19th century.



Distinctive Red Seals

United States notes featured a red seal and serial number.



Long Circulation Period

These notes remained in use until 1971.

SYMBOLS, PORTRAITS, AND LEGACY





SYMBOLISM ON US COINS

Ancient Roots of Coin Symbols

Greek and Roman motifs inspire US coin designs.

Liberty Cap and Winged Cap

Symbolize freedom and freedom of thought.

Wreaths, Shields, and Eagles

Represent victory, unity, and national pride.

Olive Branch and Arrows

Stand for peace and readiness for war.

MEANING BEHIND COIN SYMBOLS



Liberty Cap: Symbol of Freedom

Represents liberty, given to freed Roman slaves



Olive Branch & Arrows: Peace and War

Olive branch stands for peace; arrows signify readiness for war



Union Shield & Stars: National Unity

Shield and stars reflect Congress, the 13 colonies, and America's unity

PORTRAITS AND NAMES ON NOTES



Legislation Mandates Portrait Names

All banknotes must display the name of the individual below their portrait.



Enhances Historical Recognition

Names help the public identify and learn about figures on currency.



Standard Practice Since Enactment

This requirement continues on all modern U.S. banknotes.

THE LEGENDARY LAZY DEUCE

A Collector's Icon

The 'Lazy Deuce' \$2 note is highly prized by currency enthusiasts.

Distinctive Design Elements

Features allegorical figures, American flag, and unique horizontal '2'.

Scarcity Drives Value

Notes from rare banks and territories are especially sought after.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Currency as a Mirror of History

Designs and materials reflect pivotal moments and values.



Symbols and Nicknames Tell Stories

From 'greenbacks' to 'sawbuck,' each name has roots in culture.



Evolution Connects Past and Present

Modern coins and notes build on centuries of tradition.