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“Symbols Are Important”: Nation-States and the Images on Our Money

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Abstract
Visual rhetoric has been an area of growing interest for those within the communication field, and this study aims to add to that body of work. One area within the study of visual rhetoric is the everyday, mundane images produced by nation-states, and more narrowly, the images on a nation’s currency. Traditionally, scholars who study images on currency have seen them through the lens of state-as-pedagogue—in other words, that the state is using that “sacred space” to teach their citizenry. Political theorist and scholar Jacques E.C. Hymans (2204, 2010) challenges this notion, and instead posits that nation-states try to connect with their citizenry through a state-as-legitimacy-seeker approach in which the goal is to connect, not by teaching, but by capturing the spirit of the age. This study applies Hymans’ methodology to the images on the obverse side of the US dollar coin from its inception in 1794 to the beginning of the Presidential dollar coin collection in 2011. It was found that Hymans’ method holds promise for studying nation-state motivations behind the images on money, and more broadly, for visual rhetoricians interested in the intersection between nation-states, messages, motivation, and image.


Introduction
Young girls across this country will soon be able to see an inspiring woman on the ten dollar bill who helped shape our country into what is today and know that they too can grow up and do something great for their country. (Lee)

United States Senator Jeanne Shaheen recently remarked that the $10 bill will be the first American paper money to picture a woman. Currently the face on the $10 bill is that of the first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, and he has graced the bill since 1928. Current Treasury Secretary Jack Lew sees the inclusion of a woman as a monumental step forward, because it signals to the American public “how important it is to recognize the role that women have played in our national life and in our national history.” He goes on to say that, even though it is only a symbolic representation on money, it is significant because “symbols are important” (Lee).

Symbols are no doubt important, but are symbols important on currency? After all, money is used every day and in many ways, but do people notice the images on their currency?
Do they even care? There is a growing body of research that sees the study of images on money as a valuable way to analyze the values and ideas a nation-state is trying to communicate to its citizens. Eric Helleiner notes that a national currency “may foster national identities . . . through cultivating a collective memory and a nationalist culture . . .” (1414). Josh Lauer argues that American paper money should be seen as a form of mass media—an attempt by the government to merge legal obligations of tender with national mythic symbols to “impute value” to its citizenry (111). So what are the messages and motivations behind the images chosen for a nation’s money? The answers to this question would be helpful not only to those interested in how nation-states create cultural identification, but also to communication scholars interested in the study of visual rhetoric.

Rhetorical scholar Sonja Foss says visual rhetoric has two meanings: “In the first sense, visual rhetoric is a product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating. In the second, it is a perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which images perform communication” (143). This study focuses on the second meaning of visual rhetoric and on adding to a better understanding of how state-produced images communicate to their public. Visual rhetorical scholarship has already delved into the power of the mundane, mass-produced, state-manufactured image, and this study could add to that growing body of work by potentially offering new insights into how nation-states, motive, and images come together to “perform communication.”

**Research on Images on Currency**

This section will provide a broad overview of the existing research on the images found on currency. In particular, this literature review will focus on research that looks at how nation-states use the images they place on their money. Much of this research takes what Jacques Hymans calls a “state-as-pedagogue” approach. In this approach, the images found on a country’s currency are seen as a way for the state to teach citizens about their history, cultural heroes, and what is expected from them: the images serve primarily a teaching function (“Changing Color” 6). A good example of this approach is the work done by Eric Helleiner and Emily Gilbert in their book *Nation-States and Money: The Past, Present and Future of National Currencies* (1999).

Emily Gilbert shows how Canada used its currency to negotiate symbols of nationhood. She writes, “Moreover, the public was further linked together through the currency in that it was a simple and effective medium for the communication of national symbols” (26). Gilbert shows how Canada used this circulating text to promote certain images it wanted its citizens to see. She notes, “. . . the images of money advanced official ideologies of the nation-state to itself as well as to outsiders” (41).

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Christina McGinley analyzed the representations of women on the US dollar coin during the early part of the nineteenth-century. She observed, “Coins are an important means by which nationality is represented and through which citizens identify themselves . . . Coinage and its iconography, therefore, work symbolically to define the boundaries between the public and private as an ‘arm’ of the State” (247). She examined the way the female imagery on these dollar coins evolved, and how the ruling male audience reacted to them. Ultimately, she took a state-as-pedagogue approach in showing how these coins reveal the way the American state wanted its citizenry to look at women in its society. Virginia Hewitt also revealed the way countries within the British Commonwealth used images on money to “. . . symbolise both British authority and indigenous cultures” (97). Hewitt makes the interesting note that the struggle over the images that would go on the Euro shows “. . . how closely paper currencies and the images they carry have become associated with national identity” (97).

Eric Helleiner contends that the design on banknotes is important in fostering national pride. He quotes a letter from S. M. Clark, a clerk in the White House, to then Secretary of the Treasury Solomon Chase, explaining why the imagery on the American dollar bill was chosen:

The laboring man who should receive every Saturday night, a copy of the Surrender of Burgoyne for his weekly wages, would soon inquire who General Burgoyne was, and to whom he surrendered. This curiosity would be aroused and he would learn the facts from a fellow laborer or from his employer. The same would be true of other National pictures, and in time many would be taught leading incidents in our country’s history, so that they would soon be familiar to those who would never read them in books, teaching them history and imbuing them with a National feeling (1412).

These images were going to be seen by a majority of the population, and as Helleiner points out, “Images on money may also have been particularly effective tools of propaganda because they were encountered so regularly in the context of daily routines” (1413). The images chosen to be part of an American’s everyday experience were important in shaping the users’ beliefs in what America was going to be. In a more recent article, Peter Bayers echoes this sentiment when he notes that, even though the symbols on a coin may not be looked at closely, because of their daily circulation these images are “ingrained in the popular unconscious” and are avenues through which the government can teach its people about the nation (38). He goes on to analyze the way the US Mint has depicted Native Americans on the recent nickel and what it is teaching the citizenry through the myths the Federal Government continues to propagate.

These studies show the importance of the way symbolic representation on money helps to form a citizen’s national self-identity. Currency, in these theorists’ eyes, has become more than just a vehicle for the easy transfer of money; it has also become one of the many ways the nation-state tells its stories to its people. The images on any nation’s currency help to propagate stories of national heroes and villains, and these repetitive images serve to build a sense of national identity. In this way, the state assumes the role of pedagogue teaching its citizenry.

The state-as-pedagogue approach has its merits, but some believe this approach does not fully reflect the way a state uses images on its currency. As Jacques Hymans notes, “States that simply boast of their power risk offending the reigning values and ontologies of the day . . .” ("East Is East" 97). To Hymans, a better approach is to view the images on currency as a way for the state to connect to the “spirit of the times” in an attempt to increase its legitimacy with its citizenry. Researching the images on the Euro, Jacques Hymans calls this the “state-as-legitimacy-seeker” approach ("Changing Color” 19).
In this approach, the state does not generally have the time or the power to impose its nationalist views on the public: “The state is rarely secure, powerful and motivated enough to force-feed its values on its citizenry” (“Changing Color” 6). Instead, the state seeks to mirror cultural shifts and convey its legitimacy to its citizens by connecting with the ideas or concepts that seem important to its people at that time. What better way for the nation-state to be heard than to link with the current voices of its citizens: the cries of the people become the cries of the state. Hymans sees in this approach a better explanation for the images used by nation-states on their money (“Changing Color” 6).

In developing his state-as-legitimacy-seeker approach, Hymans borrows from the work of Ronald Inglehart and John Meyer and their concept of “cultural shifts.” This approach posits that “certain ideas and values have risen and fallen internationally” (“Changing Color” 8). These ideas and values can be traced through shifts in the locus of social power and initiative within a society. These shifts in who or what is the main actor or initiator of power move forward from the State, to the broader society, and finally to the individual (“Changing Color” 8). Inglehart and Meyers then show that along with each shift in actor, there has also been a shift in the goals of life within societies: from devotion to a country’s traditions when the state was the actor, to material progress when society was the actor, and finally, to the current post-materialist goal of enjoying the journey rather than only the destination when the individual is the actor (“Changing Color” 8). So these shifts occur along two axes: “the locus of actorhood and nature of the goals” (“Changing Color”, 19).

Hymans developed a methodology using Inglehart and Meyer’s cultural-shifts model and applied it to the images on European paper money from the onset of national banks in the 19th century to the present day to see if there were any apparent cultural shifts (“Changing Color” 9). His methodology will be examined in more detail later on in this paper; suffice it to say Hymans found that the cultural-shifts model held a lot of merit. He found that the images on the paper money of various European nation states did indeed fit the cultural-shifts model as outlined by Inglehart and Meyer.

The work of Hymans seems to offer a fresh approach that could be used by those interested in the study of the rhetoric of images found on the artifacts of nation-states. Much of the work in this area has taken the state-as-pedagogue approach, yet Hymans’ method could offer new insights into the ways nation-states establish their communities and how they see their publics. If correct, the ideas of Hymans could offer rhetorical news to those interested in the visual by showing how states try to identify with their publics rather than impose their views on them. Seeing the state as legitimacy-seeker rather than as an all-knowing pedagogue, offers the rhetorical critic new ways to look at images found on a wide range of state-produced media and could lead to a fuller understanding of how the state produces and interacts with its citizenry.

Research Question

The research question driving this study is this: Will we see the same cultural trajectory, from the source of power (State to Individual) through to the meaning of life (Traditional to Post-materialist) on American money, and does the absence or inclusion of this cultural shift approach offer any new insight to visual communication scholars? One way that we will not see a new insight is in the static nature of the images found on American paper money: the dead president image has not changed much since the early 1900’s. Yet the images found on American coinage might be more fertile ground to test the merits of this approach. The obverse, or front, side of
coins has been a veritable artist’s canvas, with new images being introduced on quarters, nickels, and dollar coins on a regular basis. Also, the Hymans research looked at paper money, and this study could add to a better understanding of his approach by testing his theory on coins. To limit itself, this study will look at the images found on the obverse side of the US dollar coin.

The dollar coin was chosen for two reasons. First, it was chosen simply as a way to limit the number of images, and to give a more concrete data set. Secondly, and possibly more importantly, it was chosen because it is one of the oldest ongoing denominations in the United States, and as such, will give a good historical overview of the way this country has approached the symbols on its money. Though not as popular as dollar bills in terms of circulation, the dollar coin has consistently been used by the federal government to promote itself to its citizenry. As Ingham (2004) so succinctly states, “monetary space is sovereign space” (57) and the canvas of the dollar coin has been routinely used by the US federal government as a “space” to communicate its history values. And as mentioned earlier, these images have been “ingrained in the popular unconscious” (Bayers 13). Regardless of its popularity in terms of circulation, the obverse side of the dollar coin offers a wide variety of state-produced images, and also a rich vein of historical data to mine as we test Hyman’s theory.

**Methodology**

This study will apply the methodology of Jacques Hymans to the images on the obverse side of the US dollar coin from 1794 to the present day. To look for these cultural shifts, Hymans looked for a forward trajectory of images moving along the actor axis and the goal axis. He looked for movement along the actor axis from State, to Society, to Individual. For the goal axis, Hymans looked for images that followed a trajectory in emphasis from traditional allegiances to today’s post-materialism (“Changing Color” 9).

In analyzing these two axes, Hymans showed that the images depicting the state as actor moved through the traditional, materialist and post-materialist goals. When the actor shifted to society at large, the movement was still through the traditional, material and post-materialist goals. And finally, when the actor shifted to the individual, the images followed the same trajectory. So how are these shifts in actor and goal represented visually? Hymans decided that images with a State/Traditional orientation would be those depicting “state symbols in classical/antique garb, classical gods (e.g., Athena, Columbia), or purely ornamental figures” (“East Is East” 99). A State/Materialist orientation would be represented by “historical heads of state, generals, other statesmen (e.g., George Washington, Douglas MacArthur),” and State/Post-materialist images would be depicting “representatives of ‘official culture’ (e.g., Francis Scott Key, Edward Teller)” (“East Is East” 99).

In looking for images that conveyed movement along the Society/Traditional axes, Hymans looked for images of “classical/antique imagery of mass, class, sector or region representatives (e.g., toga-clad allegorical figure of ‘Commerce’, ‘Old Man of the Mountain’)” (“East Is East” 99). Hymans felt a Society/Materialist orientation was best represented by “imagery of real-world mass, class, sector or region representatives at work (e.g., farmers in the fields)”, and along the Society/Post-materialist axes, Hymans looked for “imagery of real-world mass, class, sector or region representatives at play (e.g., a local square dance)” (“East Is East” 99).

Finally, for the Individual/Traditional orientation, Hymans looked for images of “historical non-state actors from classical/antique era or representations of individual-level
Discourse Vol. 2, Fall 2015

virtues (e.g., Aristotle, Saint Elizabeth Seton)”, for the Individual/Materialist, images of “historical non-state actors who made significant social or economic contributions (e.g., Susan B. Anthony, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison)”, and for the Individual/Post-materialist, “historical non-state actors who made significant cultural incl. scientific contributions (e.g., Man Ray, Elvis Presley, Albert Einstein)” (“East Is East” 99). It is important to note that Hymans’ methodology only focuses on human figures on currency because of the relative ease of identifying human figures, as opposed to flowers or animals, and also because of the centrality of human figures on currency (“Changing Color” 6). Please refer to Table 1, as this will give the reader a good summation of the images and axes mentioned, as well as a visual overview of Hymans’ methodology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalist</td>
<td>Classical/antique imagery used to represent states, classical goods, ornamental figures (e.g., Columbia, Athena, classical beautiful human form)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Historical heads of state, other statesmen, soldiers (e.g., George Washington, Douglas MacArthur, US Army GI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society/Classes</td>
<td>Imagery of real-world mass, class, sector, or region representatives at work (e.g., farmers in the fields)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Historical non-state actors who made significant economic or social contributions (e.g., Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Susan B. Anthony)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmaterialist</td>
<td>Producers of “official culture” (e.g., Francis Scott Key, Edward Teller, US Marine Band)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imagery of real-world mass, class, sector, or region representatives at play (e.g., a local square dance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical non-state actors who made significant cultural incl. scientific contributions (e.g., Man Ray, Elvis Presley, Albert Einstein)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Texts to Be Studied

This section will briefly discuss the dollar coins that will be the focus of this study. The first dollar coins produced by the American colonies were the variety of continental dollar coins. These coins featured a wide variety of designs and were not made by a central banking authority, so the quality and imagery varied widely. The first standardized dollar coin was the Flowing Hair silver dollar from 1794 to 1795 (see Figure 1). Then came the Draped Bust design from 1796 to 1803 (see Figure 2), the Seated Liberty design from 1836 to 1873 (see Figure 3), the Morgan design from 1878 to 1921 (see Figure 4), the Peace design from 1921 to 1964 (see Figure 5), the Eisenhower design from 1971 to 1978 (see Figure 6), the Susan B. Anthony design from 1979 to 1999 (see Figure 7), the Sacagawea golden dollar from 2000 to 2006 (see Figure 8), and finally,
the Presidential dollar coin, which began in 2007 and will come to completion in 2016 (see Figure 9).

The modern process of making coins starts with an approved sketch in the Engraving Department at the Philadelphia Mint. This sketch is then turned by a sculptor-engraver into a model twelve times bigger than the actual coin. A negative is cast from this model, which is then touched up; legends, such as lettering on the coin, are also added at this point. Finally, a positive model called a galvano is made from the negative, and this finished model is then approved for minting by the Mint director and the Secretary of the Treasury (Gibbs and Segan 327). When minting began in 1794, the process of achieving an “approved sketch” was much simpler: the chief engraver of the US Mint created the image he felt was the most appropriate. Now, a sketch must go through an approval process involving various committees, such as the Fine Arts Commission, before an image is approved for minting.

This study will only focus on the images on the front of the coins for two reasons: (1) the relative frequency of change on the front, as opposed to the reverse, side of the coins; and (2) the front continues to receive the most scrutiny by the general public. The front of the dollar coin has changed with every new issue, from allegorical female figures, to real men from history. By contrast, the reverse of the coin has consistently shown an eagle and has not been subject to the same level of debate over how it should look. Also, the obverse of the coin is the side that has come under the most scrutiny by the public and collectors. One example would be the 50 States Quarter series launched in 1999. In this series, only the front changed, indicating that it is the side of most importance in terms of analyzing the coin’s visual impact upon the public. In sum, this study will analyze the obverse, or front, side of each of the various dollar coins, starting with the Flowing Hair dollar coin and ending with the George Washington dollar coin.

Procedure of Study

This study will look at the dollar coins as they were released from 1794 to 2011 and apply the descriptions offered by Hymans of images as they fall along the two axes of actor and goal of life. Only the obverse image will be examined, as the reverse side has consistently featured an image of an eagle or the Statue of Liberty and has not changed much over the years. It will then be decided which of Hymans’ descriptions of actor and goal best captures the overall impact of each image.

Analysis

In looking at the images on the dollar coin, at first the Actor/Goal of State/Traditional was most prominent. From the first dollar coin issued in 1794, known as the Flowing Hair dollar coin, to the 1935 Peace dollar coin, the main image depicted was that of an allegorical female. This fits the State/Traditionalist goal described by Hymans as “state symbols in classical/antique garb, classical gods (e.g., Athena, ‘Columbia’), or purely ornamental figures” (“Changing Color” 10). Each of these figures fits the idea of a classic state symbol that of a personification of

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2 This study will not include the trade design from 1873 to 1885 because the coin did not circulate in America. It was strictly used for overseas trading, which is why it is called the trade dollar. Bruce Amspacher, “The Different Types of US Dollar Coins” pcrs.com, 6 November 2015, [database online]; available from http://www.pcgs.com/News/The-Different-Types-Of-Us-Dollar-Coins accessed 9 August, 2015.
Liberty in the classic look of the goddess Columbia. Most of the images from 1794 to 1935 showed just the portrait of a woman, with the exception of the standing Liberty image, where the female image of Liberty was depicted sitting with a shield by her side. The image on the Draped Bust dollar of 1795 looked less like a classical god and more like what one critic describes as a “buxom Roman matron, with rich, curling tresses scarcely contained by the ribbon and large bow at the back of her head . . .” (Vermeule 30). Yet following Hymans’ methodology, that image would still fall squarely in the classical category (see Figures 1-5).

In 1965 the Eisenhower dollar coin was introduced, featuring the portrait of the 34th President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower (see Figure 6). Here we see a cultural shift from that of State/Traditionalist, to that of State/Materialist. Hymans describes the images found in the State/Materialist axes as “historical heads of state, generals, other statesmen (e.g., George Washington, Douglas MacArthur)” (“Changing Color” 10). The use of the portrait of a president would signify a cultural shift from allegorical images of liberty to real images of what liberty means to us as a country. So here we clearly see a cultural shift toward the Materialist goal, but remaining with the State as actor.

The next change in image on the dollar coin was in 1979, featuring the portrait of Susan B. Anthony, a famous American suffragette and important historical figure (see Figure 7). In the coding method offered by Hymans, this image is described as “Historical non-state actors who made significant social or economic contributions (e.g., Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Susan B. Anthony)” (“East Is East” 99). Hymans would place this image in the Individual/Materialist category, which suggests a distinct cultural shift in American society. It also shows more of a leap in the locus of power than a gradual shift as the Ingham-Myers model predicted. Instead we see a move from State directly to Individual as the source of power, and that might help to account for the failure of the coin: it represented too great a shift for the general public and did not reflect the cultural mood. In the Reagan era, a coin that had an image from the intermediary Society/Classes actor might have fared better than a leap to the Individual. The coin came out in 1979, at a time when the American people were moving from the post-Watergate, Jimmy Carter era to the beginnings of the more conservative Reagan era. The nation-state sought to legitimize itself by connecting with the image and story of a cultural revolutionary, but in doing so it might have misread the growing conservative cultural milieu.

The next change in the image on the dollar coin was in the year 2000, with the introduction of the Sacagawea golden dollar (see Figure 8). This coin depicts the Native American woman Sacagawea with her child on her back. Sacagawea would be known to most Americans as the woman who helped Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery in their trek through the Louisiana Purchase: without her aid, Lewis and Clark would have surely failed. This image falls within the Individual category and best represents the Post-materialist goal. The Individual/Post-materialist category is described by Hymans as “historical non-state actors who made significant cultural incl. scientific contributions (e.g., Man Rey, Elvis Presley, Albert Einstein)” (“Changing Color” 10). In placing this image along the goal axis of the table, this study sees Sacagawea as better representing a contribution to the sciences or arts than to the economic wellbeing of the country. Though it could be argued that exploring and mapping the Louisiana Purchase contributed greatly to the economic betterment of this country, this study would argue that the Sacagawea image is best seen as that of a nurturer, which is also explicitly shown through the mother and child motif. If this coin had used images of Lewis and Clark, who were employed by the state, then it would fall in the Traditional/Materialist, rather than Post-materialist, category.
Finally, in February 2007 the dollar coin image changed once again with the beginning of the Presidential dollar coin program (see Figure 9). Through this program, “The United States is honoring our Nation’s Presidents by issuing $1 circulating coins featuring their images in the order that they served in office. The United States Mint issues four Presidential $1 Coins each year . . .” (“The Presidential $1 Coins”). This program reflects another leap, but this time backward against the trajectory the coins had been following. As stated earlier, Inglehart and Myers believe that society is moving forward along the Actor/Goal axes from State/Traditionalist to the current Individual/Post-Materialist. If Inglehart and Myers are correct, then the inclusion of the faces of past presidents means that the images on the US dollar coin have moved back to the State/Materialist orientation.

**Results**

The first result to come out of this study is the indication that the state-as-legitimacy-seeker model does hold promise for the analysis of state-produced images. It was found that the images found on the US dollar coin moved along the goal axis on a trajectory from Traditional, to Materialist, to Post-materialist. Also, the movement along the actor axis followed a trajectory from State, to Society, to Individual. Overall, this study shows that the state’s motivation in choosing images for dollar coins could connect with public sentiment rather than to teach the citizenry. In rhetorical theory, we might call this nation-state practice an attempt at Burkean *identification*.

This idea of the state attempting to connect with a cultural zeitgeist seems to model Kenneth Burke’s ideas of identification and consubstantiality. According to Burke, one of the fundamental ways that people are persuaded is through finding common ground: “. . . two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an ‘identification’ . . .” (Burke 21). Burke goes on to say that identification is achieved when two parties perceive a “consubstantiality” with each other (21). If the nation-state is producing images that connects with the present citizenry, this would seem to model *identification* and *consubstantiality* at their finest. And viewing the state’s motivation as legitimacy-seeking rather than pedagogical could offer new avenues for rhetorical analyses of a wide variety of state-produced images.

The second finding of this study is that the cultural shifts have not occurred incrementally in the American experience. From 1794 to 1971, the images did seem to move incrementally along the trajectory predicted by Hymans in his original study, but with the introduction of the Susan B. Anthony dollar in 1979, the trajectory skips over Society as actor directly to Individual as actor. The shift along the goal trajectory, from Materialist in 1971 with the Eisenhower dollar, to Post-materialist with the Susan B. Anthony dollar, does seem incremental. The biggest jump was seen along the actor axis: instead of incremental movement from the State, through Society, to the Individual, images began with the State as actor, then skipped over Society to land squarely in the Individual locus of power.

This leaping movement, rather than incrementally, was not expected by Hymans, who instead posited a gradual shift in trajectory described by Inglehart and Meyer. The question this study asks is whether that leap is the result of an attempt by the state to connect with the citizenry (state-as-legitimacy-seeker), or an attempt to teach its people about the historical figures who built the nation (state-as-pedagogue). Following the state-as-legitimacy-seeker approach could suggest that nation-states may sometimes attempt to leap, rather than step incrementally, to connect with its citizens. In using the image of Susan B. Anthony, the nation-
state may have sensed that the country was ready to celebrate the life of a woman praised for her defiance of authority. But, as noted earlier, the nation was moving in an opposite direction at the time and the state may have jumped too far along the actor axis.

A third result is the finding that the images on money can follow a backward trajectory. This backward movement was seen in 2007, when the trajectory of images along the actor axis moved from the Individual (Sacagawea) back to the State (US Presidents). This backward movement was not found in Jacques Hymans’ original study looking at European money, but it is seen in the images found on American dollar coins. Does this mean that the spirit of the times might be reversing to an earlier goal and actor, or that the state simply missed the cultural shift it was trying to embrace? Or does it better fit the state-as-pedagogue model?

Hymans sees backward movement in the images found on British and American currency. He connects this to the cost of changing images on money that is used worldwide: “It might be that changing the imagery on hegemonic, globally utilized paper money involves much higher transaction costs, including the cost of informing end-users of the changes and the cost of collecting the old bills for replacement. These costs may induce the hegemon to maintain its money’s traditional ‘look’ ” (“Changing Color” 29). In other words, cost may force the state to not seek legitimacy through its currency, even though it may want to. Clearly this is not the case with the US dollar coin, as the dollar coin does not have the same global usage as American paper money. If the Inglehart and Myers cultural-shifts approach is correct, what does this say about the American nation-state? If we stick with the legitimacy-seeker approach, maybe this backward trajectory is an attempt to convey to the citizenry the worth of state-produced money and programs. In 2007, the American economy began to fall into a recession, which lasted until the end of 2009 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics). The state, in seeking identification with the people, sought to allay fears and reassure the populace that indeed their money was worth something. One way to accomplish this was to remind people of the great leaders of their nation’s past, and thus move the source of power back to the State.

The fourth finding of this study is that motivations behind the images chosen by the state are not always easily discerned. Until the introduction of the Presidential coin series, the images being used on the dollar coin seemed to fit Hymans’ proposed model. But the shift to images of past Presidents raises the question: is this a sign of a backward trajectory along the actor axis within the state-as-legitimacy-seeker approach, or is this a prime example of the state acting as a teacher, a pedagogue? Or is this some combination of the two—the state teaching its citizens as a form of legitimacy seeking? Either way, this study shows that discerning the motivations behind state images is highly dependent upon which approach you choose. Whether you see the state as legitimacy seeker or the state as pedagogue, you can find a way to justify your approach. This is problematic with Hymans’ model, and leads to the final result.

The final result of this study is that the state-as-legitimacy-seeker approach needs a multiplicity of coins to better assess the movement along the axes of actor and goals. In looking only at US dollar coins, we may be limiting ourselves too much in the images available to be coded and compared. Instead, if we looked at a cross-section of US coins, we might get a better sense of the movement among society’s goals and actors. For instance, at the same time the dollar coin began to focus on past Presidents, the images on the US nickel began to celebrate the Lewis and Clark expedition in 2005, and in 2010 the US Mint released the first in a new series of quarters depicting America the Beautiful. Looking at these images together might give us a better understanding of the motivations behind the state’s choice of imagery, and a better grasp of the cultural shifts with which the state is trying to connect.
Areas for Further Research

As stated earlier, research using this model may need to look at a larger cross-section of American coins. It could be worthwhile to compare the imagery on the penny, nickel, dime, quarter, and dollar coins. Another area that could be examined is the 50 States Quarter series completed by the US mint in 2008. In this program, each state picked the image for its state quarter. This series could provide an interesting way to explore how the nation-state connects with the cultural shift of the age: images chosen by the people become the images the nation uses to identify with its people.

Another area for future research would be to move beyond images on currency. Does Hymans’ approach hold merit for those interested in looking at images beyond our coins and currencies? One area outside of the images on money that could be examined with the cultural-shifts approach would be US stamps. As with coins, the stamp has been a canvas on which the state has regularly tried to portray itself to its citizens. This methodology could be applied to any mass-produced state image that has changed over the course of time, such as images on passports.

Finally, can Hymans’ methodology move beyond coding for only human figures? To study the 50 State Quarters series, for instance, it would be necessary to code for state flowers and birds. How do non-human figures fit the actor/goal axes, and would it be possible to code them?

Conclusion

Senator Shaheen hopes that the image of a woman on the ten dollar bill will instill in the people of America a better understanding of the impact women have made in the history of this country (Lee). She sees it as a chance to teach the masses, but what is the motivation of the federal government charged with creating that image? Does it see it as an opportunity to act as a pedagogue, teaching its citizens what it means to be a part of that nation, or as a chance to catch the spirit of the age and produce an image that strengthens identification between the people and the nation-state? This question of motivation behind the images the nation-state chooses to place on its money has been the focus of this study.

Jacques Hymans believes that a nation-state’s main motive for the images it produces is to seek legitimacy with its people. Applying the work of political theorists Ingelhart and Myers, Hymans has created a methodology to look at that very thing: how nation-states try to create a sense of legitimacy with their people through the images they place on their money. This study applied his methodology to the images on the obverse side of the US dollar coin from 1794 to 2011. Hymans argues that we will see a forward trajectory in society being mirrored in the images on our money. That trajectory will see the locus of power, and the overall national goal shift from state to individual, and from material acquisition to enjoying the journey called life. That trajectory will be reflected in the images on our money, as the nation-state producing those images tries to capture, or reflect, that same cultural shift it senses in its people.

This trajectory was seen to be partially accurate with the images found on the US dollar coin, but it seemed to move forward in a leaping fashion, rather than incrementally as proposed by Hymans. In the end, the forward cultural trajectory that Hymans describes seemed to come to a stop with the introduction of the Presidential coin series starting in 2011. Whether this was a sign of a backward trajectory or the state reasserting its pedagogical function was, in the end,
hard to ascertain. Yet this study has shown that Hymans’ approach can be fruitful for those interested in the motives behind the images on our money. Scholars interested in visual rhetoric may find in Hymans’ work a new and useful way to further explore state-produced images.

Figure 1. Flowing hair dollar by United States Mint, Smithsonian Institution - National Numismatic Collection, National Museum of American History. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flowing_hair_dollar.jpeg#/media/File:Flowing_hair_dollar.jpeg


Figure 4. Morgan Silver dollar by Brandon Grossardt for the coin image. George T. Morgan for the coin design. - Actual coin. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1879S_Morgan_Dollar_NGC_MS67plus_Obverse.png#media/File:1879S_Morgan_Dollar_NGC_MS67plus_Obverse.png

Figure 7. Susan B. Anthony dollar by US Mint (coin); Heritage Auctions (image) - Heritage Auctions Lot 1449, 29 April 2010. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1981-S_SBA$_2_Type_Two_Deep_Cameo.jpg#/media/File:1981-S_SBA$_2_Type_Two_Deep_Cameo.jpg

Figure 8. Sacagawea golden dollar. Image used by permission of the worldcoingallery.com.
Works Cited


