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Symbols on the US Dollar



**What They Reveal About How the
US Dollar Became the Reserve
Currency of the World**

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**SYMBOLS ON THE US DOLLAR: WHAT THEY REVEAL
ABOUT HOW THE US DOLLAR BECAME THE RESERVE
CURRENCY OF THE WORLD**

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In memory of my mother

Introduction

The US dollar has come a long way since its introduction in 1792. Over time, it evolved into the world's reserve currency, holding the highest level of confidence and liquidity, and surpassing all other currencies in circulation. In times of geopolitical turmoil and a lack of trust in other monetary systems, the US dollar becomes the currency of choice of foreigners and foreign institutions that convert and park their money in US dollars. When we handle these Federal Reserve Notes, we overlook the symbols that adorn them. They hold some answers to why the US dollar attained its dominant status and is the most recognized currency in the world.

Of all the banknotes with their varied values and different figures displayed on them, the focus of this writing is on the note with George Washington's portrait on it. The first president symbolizes the number one figure in the pantheon of historic heroes of the United States of America. An image closely associated with the foundation of a nation that became the dominant power of the world. And this power is eminently represented in the trust in the US dollar.

There are 20 countries using a currency called 'dollar.' However, the US' economic dominance eclipses the visibility of all other dollar denominations in circulation. The name comes from an Americanized pronunciation of the German word '*thaler*,' referring to a silver coin used in Europe in the 16th through 19th centuries. During the War of Independence, the colonists favored the term 'dollar' over the British pound as a way to make a political statement and mark an economic separation with Britain. As for the dollar sign, it stems from the Spanish '*real de ocho*,' or Spanish 8 '*reales*' coins, that were in circulation throughout the American colonies.

The Federal Reserve note is also referred to on occasion as a Greenback. The name refers to a paper currency issued by the United States during the American Civil War. The note was used as a circulating bond that no longer paid interest. They were called Greenbacks because of the green color printed on the back of the note that no longer showed a timetable of interest payable. The note was legal tender backed solely on the credibility of the government, a precursor of the current currency. It shared a similar color to the one that adorns the present-day US bills.

One Dollar

On the top of the current bill, the words ‘Federal Reserve Note’ appear, stating the upper position and supervisory nature of the central bank’s role over the lending institutions under its control.



Under it lays the caption ‘The United States of America,’ and the statement ‘This note is legal tender for all debts, public and private.’ The bill has the serial number enumerated on the top right and bottom left corners. In four places, the Federal Reserve District number ‘7’ is visible. The number matches the letter ‘G’ as a designation for the Chicago Reserve Bank’s location. Varied numbers and alphabetical letters from A to L that match the designation of the twelve federal district locations appear on different notes. On the right, the word ‘one’ is superimposed over the seal of the Department of the Treasury and, above it, is the name of the US capital.

The seal depicts a chevron with thirteen stars, representing the original thirteen states. Above the chevron stands a balance, representing the legal system, and below it is the image of a key, representing the Fed’s access to a restricted area of financial power. The phrase ‘The Department of the Treasury’ is written around the rim, and below it is the year the department was established. Next to the Seal on the right, in a smaller font, is the plate serial number. On the left side under the serial number appears the signature of the current Treasurer, and on the right, in a smaller font is the series’ year and the signature of the Secretary of the Treasury. At the center of the bill the portrait of the first president with his name appearing below it is showcased.



The dollar displays the name of two Federal [institutions](#): the U.S. Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve System (Fed). The Treasury Department was established in 1789. Its responsibility consists of making payments based on the budget set by the Legislature and disbursing the money voted by the Executive branch. The Treasury is also in charge of the Bureau of Engraving and of printing the money. The Fed acts like the government's banker, processing transactions and acting as an intermediary between the government and the private banking system.

The Federal Reserve

Although the US dollar has been in circulation since 1792, we begin with a synopsis on the creation of a federal institution that is associated with central banking and banknotes that became the reserve currency of the world.

* * *

In the aftermath of the financial Panic in 1907, a private consortium of banks organized a meeting in order to establish a way to accomplish what J.P. Morgan did when he organized a banker's coalition that stopped the panic during the market meltdown.

The bankers' meeting resulted in Congress enacting the Aldrich Vreeland Act of 1908 that established the National Monetary Commission. A study group of experts was formed to come up with a nonpartisan solution to avoid another panic. Members of the group were sent to Europe to find out how central banks in Britain handled the economic stabilization of their markets. Their findings revealed that the US' lack of a central bank was an underlying weakness of the financial system.

The study group's conclusion prompted Senator Nelson W. Aldrich to organize a secret meeting with several prominent bankers at Jekyll Island, a resort island off the coast of Georgia, to formulate banking reform, including plans for a central banking system.

Newspaper reports of the secret meeting and the location's name of Jekyll Island inspired some conspiracy theories. Human nature, it seems, finds more comfort in being entertained by fiction than it does facing the boring reality of a market economy. The reason for the secrecy was merely the result of the public's hatred of banker after the market panic. Bankers feared that any plans they proposed would be rejected outright by the elected politicians.

The proposed plan consisted of a system of twelve regional central banks, called National Reserve Associations (NRA), whose actions would be coordinated by a national board of commercial bankers to become a lender of last resort. In its new role, the NRA would make emergency loans to member banks. It would create money that could be exchanged equally and act as a fiscal agent for the federal government.

Aldrich's plan was viewed by President Woodrow Wilson and the Democrats as giving more control of the financial system to bankers without leaving any leverage to politicians. A majority of Republicans and a small number of Democrats recognized the pressing need for a central banking system and, after deliberations, reached a compromise. On December 23, 1913, the Federal Reserve Act was enacted with a vote of 43 in favor and 25 against.

American banks became shareholders of the Fed. As such, they contribute money to create a bailout system to provide the cash needed to prevent bank failures by stimulating the economy when banks could not, or would not, lend.

The act altered the role of money by making it 'elastic.' This new elastic money would be part of an essential function played by the Federal Reserve System of regulating the amount of money in circulation by increasing or decreasing the money supply as the economy shrank or expanded, specifically increasing the supply of cash during a financial crisis to meet the demand for withdrawals and to offset the need to sell assets to pay debts. The temporary increase in the money supply would, in theory, cushion the effects of a recession.

At the outset, the Fed was created to buy short-term corporate bonds to help businesses stimulate the economy. However, during World War I, Congress mandated that the Fed must buy government bonds. As a result, the central bank's original role was irrevocably altered, ushering in the dawn of government debt. The Fed was never reinstated to its original purpose, and it eventually morphed into 'quasi-political-governmental-agency.'

The Images on the One Dollar Bill

The first dollar did not have the portrait of George Washington on it. That honor was given to Salmon P. Chase, the Secretary of the Treasury, on a bill issued in 1862. Chase was a jurist who served as the sixth Chief Justice and as the 25th United States Secretary of the Treasury. In 1869, the note was redesigned to feature the portrait of George Washington painted by an artist named Gilbert Stuart.



George Washington was one of the Founding Fathers and the first President of the United States. His role in American history has a unique place above all other historical heroes. This is shown by the number of memorial structures and artistic representations that have been created in his memory. Some of these emblems are grandiose to say the least.

One of the most visible examples is the [Washington Monument](#), which is located on the National Mall a short distance from the nation's political power center in a city named after him. The construction of the giant obelisk was made possible by the Washington National Monument Society founded in 1833. The society took over the project because Congress did not keep its promise to erect a monument that was deserving of the national hero. The construction of the monument began in 1848. However, the project was interrupted several times by political hijacking, lack of funds, and the Civil War. It was finally completed in 1885.



In 1865, while the construction of the monument was still underway, the last touches of the Apotheosis of Washington were completed on the ceiling of the dome in the rotunda of the Capitol Building. The fresco is the artistic creation by an Italian artist named Constantino Brumidi. Visitors of the rotunda can view the fresco of Washington sitting on a throne in a heavenly setting flanked by the goddess Victoria to his left and the goddess Liberty to his right. As the title of the artwork implies, the fresco is a visual glorification of a hero elevated into the status of a demigod.



Prominent Roman emperors were often consecrated as demigods after their death. The deification did not make them part of the pantheon. In a similar fashion, George Washington's image was portrayed in the apotheosis and elevated to a heavenly setting above ordinary mortals.

The Great Seal

The reverse side of the note displays symbols that are unique to the one dollar bill. Only on that note is the Great Seal of the United States visible. Other notes display varied historical figures and have a portrait of different buildings on their reverse side.



The [Great Seal](#) of the United States is rich in symbolism. It was originally designed in 1792 and first appeared on silver coins. Only later, in 1935, was it added on paper money with its elaborate floral design. One part of the seal consists of the image of a pyramid and the other of an eagle.

The design of the seal originated with the Founding Fathers, the result of a compromise that took six years of deliberations by three succeeding design committees. Several ideas for the design were made by a consultant and designer named Pierre Eugene du Simitiere. These ideas were included in a proposal made by Charles Thomson, an Irish-born patriot from Philadelphia who served fifteen years as Secretary of the Continental Congress (1774-1789) and was submitted to Congress on June 20, 1782.

The design did not include an image dear to Benjamin Franklin, who was a member of the first committee. It featured a pharaoh on a chariot chasing the Israelites through a parted sea. The scene included the motto 'rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.' Franklin's additional idea, to see a turkey rather than an eagle, did not generate the committee's majority support.



One part of the Great Seal consists of an eagle with a shield covering its body. It is divided into two parts: one blue band representing Congress, and under it 13 red and white vertical stripes representing the original colonies. The Latin words '*E Pluribus Unum*,' which translates to 'out of many one,' is displayed on a ribbon held in the bird's beak. Fixed above the eagle's head is an alignment of 13 stars which, according to Thomson, represents "a new constellation taking its place in the universe."



The other part of the Great Seal features thirteen layers of an unfinished pyramid, representing the number of original states of the Union. Above it, and separated from the rest of the pyramid, stands a levitating triangle with an enclosed eye surrounded by emanating rays.

On the footing of the pyramid, the Roman numbers 1776 are inscribed, indicating the year of the Declaration of Independence. Arched below is a banner with the Latin inscription '*Novus Ordo Seclorum*' which, when translated, means a 'New Order of the Ages.' Thomson, who came up with the wording, explains that it stands for "the beginning of the new American Era." Above the eye stands another set of Latin words, '*Annuit Coeptis*,' which translates into 'approve and undertaking' which, according to Thomson, signifies

that Providence has favored the American cause in its undertakings.

The Great Seal did not appear on the dollar until 1935. Prior to that year, the dollar, also called the one dollar silver certificate, looked like the image below and is referred to by currency collectors as the ‘funnybacks.’



In 1934, Henry Wallace, who was then Secretary of Agriculture and who later became Vice President, happened to read an article on the history of the Great Seal. He came up with his own interpretation of what the Latin ‘*Novus Ordo Seclorum*’ meant, and translated it into a more accommodating ‘New Deal of the Ages.’ The revised translation would be helpful to promote the current administration’s political agenda. He proposed the slogan to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who liked the idea and approved the addition of the seal to the dollar. Roosevelt and Wallace were both Freemasons. They were presumably pleased to see the All-Seeing-Eye, which is also a symbol of the Great Architect of the Universe, displayed on the dollar.



The design proposal presented to the President had the eagle featured on the left side and the pyramid on the right. Roosevelt expressed his preference to see the pyramid on the left and the eagle on the right with the words ‘The Great Seal’ and ‘Of the United States’ to be added below each circle. The dollar with its final changes was officially

issued in 1935. The federal note looks almost the same as the current bill except for one additional change.

The 'In God We Trust' words first appeared in 1864 on the two-cent copper pieces, issued one year before the end of the Civil War. The words would only appear on dollar bills almost a century later.

In 1956, Congress passed a law that was signed by President Eisenhower, declaring 'In God We Trust' the national motto of the United States. The law also stated that the motto must appear on American currency, replacing the traditional motto '*E Pluribus Unum.*' The United States was no longer divided by internal conflict, but in the middle of a Cold War with a foreign enemy that was armed with nuclear weapons. In light of that, President Eisenhower and Congress elected to put the nation's Trust in the Almighty and have God as an ally to help the country defeat a regime run by communists who promoted state atheism.

Thirty-three years later, the wall that divided East and West Germany fell. The event would be followed two years later by the dissolution of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the beginning of the slow process of Russia's normalization toward democracy. The political change allowed the Christian Orthodox Church's resurgence in Russia after seventy years of state repression.

George Washington's Symbolic Status

The nation's capital bears George Washington's name, as does one state. All major cities have a street named after him. His birthday is celebrated as a national holiday. He is immortalized by the National Monument, and the Founding Father's portrait is consecrated by the fresco in the Rotunda. Statues in his honor are on display all over the country. His portrait adorns the US dollar.

His portrait is elevated above the reality of his everyday life. These emblems set his image **apart** from his ordinary being. They mark a **separation** between the man who lived among us and his image that is enshrined by the memorials. Washington is removed from the realm of ordinary beings and mediated into an otherworldly symbol.

A **symbol** is a mark, sign or word that indicates, signifies, or is understood as representing an idea, object, or relationship. Symbols allow people to go beyond what is known or seen by creating links between otherwise very different concepts and experiences.

It is this action of setting apart that constitutes the sacred. The process of sacralization can involve a being, a place or an object. Its main function consists of introducing a buffer zone between the sacred and the profane. The separation elevates the consecrated being above the ordinary mortals and establishes a symbolic view or perception of the image.

One function of mythology is to convey a special symbolic status to a being involved in the creation of a new reality. This function is also used in relation to the foundation of a nation or the induction of the first president of a new political order. Being first is honored with a unique position that is processed in history in ideological fashion and narrated in mythical terms.

Keep in mind that veneration to Washington's image only resonates as vivid and true to people who are assimilated in the American cultural narrative. People living in other countries who live within their own cultural environment have their own mythical models. They don't feel the same patriotic attachment to Washington as Americans do.

The image of Washington is fixed as the center of power of the US, a

reality that is geographically real, like borders, but intangible, like patriotism. The Founding Father represents feelings of identity and belonging to something that is greater than ourselves. These feelings are deeply felt and real, yet are hard to describe in words.

Since the nation's founding, George Washington's image has been converted into a ubiquitous image of a political union. His portrait on the dollar links the past with the present and stands for the historical progress made by the US economy.

Symbolic Interpretation

Babylonian, Egyptian, and Roman empires used the eagle as a symbol of power. In Greece and Rome, the eagle was a personal messenger to Zeus and Jupiter respectively. The bird of prey was considered sacred in both cultures. During the Roman Empire, each military legion carried a standard with an eagle on it. In Aztec mythology, the war and sun god Huitzilopochtli ordered his people to move and settle to a place where they would find an eagle perched on a cactus biting a snake. That location is now called Mexico City, and the scene has become the coat of arms of the country. The native people of America regarded the eagle as a symbol of strength, leadership, and vision.

As a symbol of **Jupiter's** authority, an eagle would be set free during the consecration of an emperor—a ritual that culminated in his 'apotheosis.' By flying into the air, the eagle was believed to carry the soul of the deified emperor to heaven, thus securing him a place among the gods.



Thomson's sketch of an "American eagle on the wing and rising" included many of the components that made it to the final version adopted by Congress. The bird's breast is covered with a shield of 13 stripes that stands for protection against tyranny, in defense of the principles behind the foundation of the nation. In his beak the bird holds an unfolding banner with the Latin words '*E Pluribus Unum*,' construed to mean, 'out of many colonies one Union.' The eagle is holding in one foot an olive branch, and in the other a bundle of 13 arrows, signifying both strength and unity while depicting a commitment to be prepared for war in order to propagate peace.

The **horizontal** top bar of the shield symbolizes the federal government, and is supported by vertical bars that represent the number of individual states, which was 13 at the time it was designed.

The design also features aspects of numerology. The eagle's tail is comprised of seven feathers, alluding to a number with symbolic significance. There are seven colors of the rainbow. There are seven notes in a musical scale. It constitutes the number of days in a week. There are seven numbers in the Roman numerical system, like the one used at the base of the pyramid. In ancient Egypt, the number was a symbol of perfection. In Genesis, the world was created in seven days, and God rested on the seventh day.

In nature, the eagle flies higher than any other bird, viewing from above all other creatures below. Only a crest, containing 13 stars and called an 'escutcheon,' is located higher than the eagle's head. Note how many times the number 13 is repeated: the shield's 13 stripes, 13 arrows and the same number of leaves on the olive branch, and the equal number of letters in both Latin mottos. The [constellation](#) is an additional reminder of the important principle of the Union and the Declaration of Independence, the foundation of the new nation and the First President.

Official description of the [crest](#) at the time of the approval of its design:

“Over the head of the Eagle which appears above the Escutcheon, A Glory, Or, breaking through a cloud, proper, & surrounding thirteen stars forming a Constellation, Argent, on an Azure field.”

Inside the crest is an alignment of stars consisting of two opposing triangles. Original documents show that Thomson's draft of an eagle did not include a hexagram, but instead a random collection of stars. The US Department of State has been using an engraving seal with a hexagram to validate official documents since 1782. There is no reliable data on who came up with the idea to include what resembles a [Star of David](#). Keep in mind that there is a significant difference between the two emblems: The people of Israel are comprised of 12 tribes whereas the escutcheon contains 13 stars. An assumption is made that the presence of the hexagram acknowledges the spiritual legacy made by the Jewish people, and that the additional star represents the formation of a 'New Order of the Ages' inaugurated by the Union.

A notable pattern underlying the symbols on the dollar is the

acknowledgment of what past civilizations bequeathed to the new political reality. Specifically, Egypt and its monument, Judaism and the Torah, Greece and democracy, Rome and Latin, as well as cultural movements like the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment. None of the symbols is singled out as more important than the other. All share a contributing touch to the design of the dollar.

The 'Promised Land' Allegory

The Puritans were among the first settlers to the New World. They were followed by Protestants and other denominations, many fleeing religious persecution in England and Europe. They brought with them the Good Book that was their primary source of literacy and spiritual guidance. Most had an unconditional belief in the word of God as narrated in the Bible. One of the central themes of the Old Testament is God's Promised Land to his **chosen people**. The religious persecution that prompted many of the newcomers' trip to the New World resonated with the experience of the Jewish people depicted in the Bible.

Settlers were not the only ones relating to biblical accounts. Several Founding Fathers viewed biblical narratives as acceptable analogies to describe the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. Historical notes show that Benjamin **Franklin**, at the time he was a member of the first design committee of the Great Seal, proposed a scene from Exodus. His idea was endorsed by Jefferson, who added his own thoughts and made some changes to Franklin's wording of the scene. Jefferson was a deist, but he nonetheless found biblical analogies useful to mobilize revolutionary and expansionist zeal.

“**Pharaoh** sitting in an open Chariot, a Crown on his head and a Sword in his hand, passing through the divided Waters of the Red Sea in Pursuit of the Israelites: Rays from a Pillar of Fire in the Cloud, expressive of the divine Presence and Command, beaming on Moses who stands on the shore and extending his hand over the Sea causes it to overwhelm Pharaoh. Motto: ‘Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.’”

On August 20, 1776, the first committee presented the Exodus proposal to Congress. Their report was left ‘to lie on the table,’ meaning it was not approved by the elected politicians.

Pyramid, Unfinished

The obelisk on the National Mall is a giant replica of monuments that were erected in ancient Egypt. They were built in honor of the sun god Ra. The Washington National Monument is both a visible tribute to an ancient civilization and a giant display of engineering progress made by the developing nation. The image of an unfinished and compacted pyramid on the Great Seal is an additional tribute to Egypt. It is meant to represent an incomplete political union of thirteen layers, or colonies, that in the course of history would result in the 50 United States of America.



The great pyramids of [Egypt](#) were made of polished white limestone that reflected the sun. The capstone that stood at the top of the pyramid, called a 'pyramidion,' was considered sacred. During the Old Kingdom, they were usually covered with gold to reflect the sun's rays. The pyramid, or geometric quadrahedron, could be seen from a great distance and were meant to inspire awe and reverence. The pyramidion was also a symbolic representation of the sun god Ra. He was believed to be the father of all Pharaohs. He created himself and the world from the primordial chaos.

Egyptian civilization lasted almost thirty centuries. The quadrahedron is a perfect architectural symbol of order and stability that exemplifies the duration of the ancient empire. What made Egypt survive for so long is fittingly represented by the mysterious yet divine power of hierarchy represented by the architectural structure of the pyramid. The monument visually embodies the worship of the god Ra and its representative on Earth, the Pharaoh.

At this point, it would be helpful to visualize the pyramid's architectural and symbolic composition. In a similar fashion to a pyramid made of building blocks, hierarchy establishes invisible

layers of status, from the broadest and devoid of power at the bottom, to a progression of status toward the highest point. Power and status increases with every superimposed layer until it reaches a single unit at the top. The zenith is symbolized by Ra and the Pharaoh. Each plane is held together by invisible cement and is separated by an invisible ceiling. Higher layers maintain their status by a control over lower levels, while lower level members are unaware of the power that holds the invisible system together. Higher status is attained by worshiping the highest levels of power symbolized by the sun god at the top. Without hierarchy and the worship of Ra, the Pharaoh would be powerless. Without Ra's creation, the world would collapse into a primordial chaos like the one that existed prior to the creation of the world.

Hierarchy is prevalent everywhere. It gives order and stability to all organizational systems. It is present in groups, institutions, governments, corporations, and even organized crime. The intangible power of hierarchy represented by the pyramid exemplifies an implicit part of the religion of ancient Egypt. The concept is also part of what religion is: a dynamic belief system that gives order and meaning by establishing awe and submission to power.

The Great Seal displays an unfinished pyramid with a radiating triangle above it. The design was put together by an artist named Pierre Eugene du Simitiere, an adviser proficient in the art of heraldry. He was hired by the first design committee to come up with sketches of the Great Seal. He referred to the levitating triangle as the 'Eye of Providence.' He described the suspended artwork in these words:

“The Eye of Providence in radiant Triangle whose Glory extends over the Shield and beyond the figures.”

The eye is a symbol that stands for several attributes. Among the more noteworthy are insight, enlightenment, vision, supervision, and surveillance. In Egyptian mythology, the eye of Ra represented the god's feminine aspect and his ability to subdue the deity's enemies.

The Great Seal is rich in symbolism relating to past cultures, delineating the historical background of the dollar. As we have noted above, Wallace and President Roosevelt were pleased to include the Great Seal on the dollar in part because they recognized the All-Seeing Eye as a symbol of Freemasonry. The history of art reveals

enlightening details on the origin of the levitating triangle.



This painting is entitled “[The Supper at Emmaus.](#)” It consists of oil on canvas painted by Jacopo Pontormo in 1525. It is exhibited at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, Italy. The radiating triangle above Jesus’ head is believed to have been painted later by a different artist named Jacopo Chimenti (1551-1640). The image was added presumably to represent the Trinity to reflect the Church of Rome’s promotion of the Counter-Reformation.

The painting depicts a scene taken from Luke 24:30-31 in which the Apostle describes Jesus as he unexpectedly joins two disciples on their way to the city of Emmaus. Neither of them recognizes the stranger at first, and once they reach their destination, the disciples invite the travel companion to supper and to stay the night. While they are sitting at the table and ready to eat, the guest gives thanks, breaks the bread, and shares it with his hosts. Suddenly, the disciples recognize their beloved teacher. As soon as they do, Christ disappears.

How did an image of a radiating triangle with an eye in its midst painted in 1525, end up becoming a symbol of Freemasonry and a part of the Great Seal displayed on the dollar? Although there is no definite answer to the question, a hypothesis is nonetheless articulated here: It is based on a historical development that took place during the period the “Supper at Emmaus” was painted.

In 1517, eight years prior to Pontormo’s completion of his painting, Martin Luther published his Ninety-Five Theses that ushered in the Protestant Reformation, an event that would erode the authority of the Papacy in Rome over its religious dominion in Europe. It would eventually foster nationalism, rationalism, and the Renaissance.

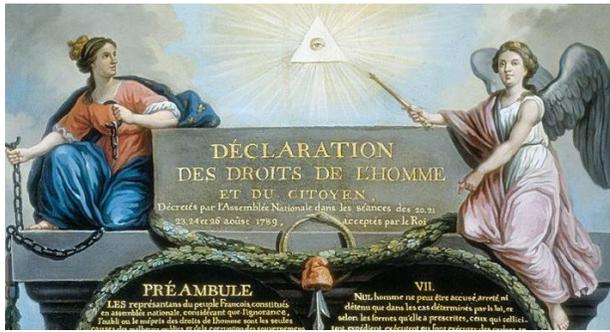
Luther proclaimed that one should not rely on the interpretation of the Bible by a single authority or institution for salvation, but should depend on one's individual reading of the Word. The Scriptures should be the only source of faith rather than Good Works. Luther's Theses triggered more than he bargained for as he unleashed not only an individual's responsibility for salvation but also a quest for truth and reason, and the development of science and individual entrepreneurship.

Hence, a hypothetical link between Pontormo's painting, the Reformation, and the Eye of Providence points to the introduction of Deism in the religious narrative of the sixteenth century. A religious discourse that will reverberate in the emblematic fabric of the US dollar. As it happens, **deism** will be endorsed by some early American Revolutionary War patriots and several prominent Founding Fathers, including Ethan Allen, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, James Madison, George Washington, and more.

The word Deism was introduced by a Swiss Reformed theologian named Pierre Viret in a work entitled "Instruction Chrétienne," which he published in 1564. He used the term to describe a group of free-thinkers who believed in one God, the Creator of the universe, but who did not subscribe to the tenets revealed in the Scriptures.

Deism gained a wider number of followers among the European intellectuals with the publication of the "Dictionnaire Historique et Critique" in 1697 by French Protestant philosopher Pierre Bayle, in which he reproduced Viret's definition of Deism. Today, the meaning has expanded to include a belief in a Creator or Supreme Being that doesn't have any anthropomorphic attributes and a deity that doesn't interfere in human affairs and doesn't perform miracles. It is defined as a 'religion of nature' without a belief in an afterlife.

The Renaissance had an enduring influence on European cultures and, in due course, developed into the Enlightenment. These religious and humanistic movements were carried over by settlers from the Old World to the New, and resonate in the Declaration of Independence and the foundation of the new nation.



A radiating eye also appears on a graphic representation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (*Declaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*), a document that was adopted by the French National Assembly on August 26th 1789, shortly after the French Revolution. Marquis de La Fayette (1757-1834), the primary author of the document, was a friend of Thomas Jefferson. The relationship is reflected by the influence that the U.S. Declaration of Independence had on the writing of the French decree. Especially the first article that states that all human beings are created equal.

The original depiction of the *Declaration* was created by an artist named Jean-Jacques-Francois Le Barbier (1738-1826). The painting is currently exposed at the Musée Carnavalet, Paris. The artwork was used as an artistic background for the decree.

“En conséquence, l'Assemblée Nationale reconnaît et déclare, en présence et sous les auspices de l'Être suprême, les droits suivants de l'Homme et du Citoyen.”

After the preamble and prior to the articles, the text acknowledges the “presence” and the “influence” of a Supreme Being, depicted by an angel pointing at the radiating eye. The image and the statement add support to the assumption made about a symbolic connection between the radiating eye and Deism.

In God We Trust

Documents posted by the US Department of the Treasury reveal the motto ‘In God We Trust’ was inspired by an increase in religious devotion during the Civil War, a sentiment that was conveyed to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase in letters he received from churchgoing people. One letter, dated November 13, 1861 and written by Rev. M. R. Watkinson from Ridleyville, Pennsylvania, is showcased as an example. In the letter, the minister is asking the Secretary of the Treasury to include the notion of an Almighty God on US coins in order to avert the perception the nation is harboring heathenism. He suggests putting words like ‘God, Liberty and Law’ instead of using an image of the goddess of Liberty.



The Reverend’s letter, and presumably others like his, prompted Secretary Chase to ask the Director of the Mint in Philadelphia to prepare a motto to reflect the minister’s sentiment. He was presented with two ideas, one of which was ‘God, Our Trust’ that the Secretary of the Treasury altered to say ‘In God We Trust.’

This is the same Salmon P. Chase who had his portrait on \$1 notes prior to George Washington. Little is known about his religious beliefs, except that he lived with his uncle who was an Episcopalian bishop while he attended school. As Secretary of the Treasury, Chase was given the responsibility to design the bank notes. In this capacity, he put his portrait on varied paper currencies in order to be widely recognized. His personal beliefs appear to be mostly motivated in advancing his political career.

The ‘In God We Trust’ credence was also used by the 125th Pennsylvania Infantry of the Union. It was exhibited as early as August 1862. The finding raised the suspicion that the reason behind the request made to the Department of the Treasury was to suggest that God sided with the Union during the Civil War.

On April 22, 1864, Congress passed an act that changed the composition of the one-cent to include the motto and authorized the minting of the two-cent coin with the words 'In God We Trust' on its coinage. The words will only appear on the dollar in 1957.

The word 'god' is a noun. It is the attribute associated with the noun 'god' that defines the deity. Foremost, the motto reveals that God's attribute is Trust. It defines the essence of the deity without any association to a specific religious denomination.

'We' is a reference to the people of the United States of America. It is an implicit acknowledgment to the Preamble of the Constitution: We the People. 'We' is an abstract notion of plurality that suggests an underlying union defined as a mystical body; a dynamic interaction between 'We,' 'Trust,' and 'God.' These principles are intangible concepts that exist in essence even though they cannot be perceived by the senses. The 'Trust in God' does not relate to any specific religion but conveys ideals of a civil religious order outlined by the symbols on the dollar as a medium of exchange.

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

The motto embodies a mystical union of three separate principles: 'We,' 'God,' and 'Trust.' These notions **displayed** on the **dollar** are explicitly related to each other as the symbolic representation of the US economy.

The motto alludes to an elusive 'Trust.' It involves a reliance on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System in its administrative capacity to fulfill their statutory mandate of achieving three goals: maximum employment, stable prices and moderate long-term interest rates.

The People: The Vital Engine of the Economy

Of all the symbolic representations outlined so far, “We” in “In God We Trust” and the meaning of the motto “Et Pluribus Unum” are the most important principles that underline the economy. On one hand, they represent a physical and political union of 50 States in terms of a common market. On the other hand, they imply a mystifying body of all the people of varied ethnic origin, past and present, that have generated the most powerful economy of the world.

The dollar is the emblematic representation of the American economy beginning with the settlers and all other immigrants who ventured to start a better life for themselves and their posterity. The newcomers established the principles of American values that would dominate the political landscape of the New World.

“All currency is backed by the total productive capacity of its people.”

— Martin Armstrong

Early settlers were financed privately from individuals and family members living abroad. Most of them were self-sufficient farmers. About ninety percent of those people lived in rural areas. Commercial activity was comprised of craftsmen and small, privately owned businesses in towns. All goods and services were produced domestically, keeping foreign trade to a minimum. The newcomers established their own elected government, courts, and essential services. Hard work, courage, and cooperation among neighbors was essential for their survival in a harsh and untamed environment. Self-reliance and a pioneering spirit constituted the character of early inhabitants codified in future generations. Ownership and exploitation of vast lands sowed the seeds of a future economic world power.

The ownership of real estate allows a person to establish a cultural identity with the land. This is especially true of immigrants that carry with them memories and nostalgic feelings of the country of origin that they left behind. Property rights secure the development

of social contacts, the formation of communities, and contribute to economic security. A great portion of early immigrants who left the Old Continent moved either because of poor economic conditions or because of the Thirty Years War. Others were fleeing serfdom or religious persecution.

The majority of newcomers were young people. They came as indentured servants hired by local farmers who needed labor to work their lands. Landowners typically paid for their trip, their food, and lodging with a contract that lasted between 4 to 7 years. At the end of the term, indentured servants were given a parcel of land to start their own farming.

This type of business model became a vital engine of the economy. Access to property rights was instrumental in attracting immigrants who, for the most part, were serfs in their own country. As it happens, the pyramid on the dollar rests on a site of unspoiled land.

The Land of Americans

“He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from new mode of life he embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.”

— Hector Saint John de Crevecoeur, 1782

Thirteen is a predominant number in the design of the dollar. It symbolizes the number of colonies that made a cultural imprint on the political identity of the country. In 1790, a census showed that the [population](#) reached almost 4 million people. Close to 90% of the inhabitants were English, Scots and Ulster Scots, and about 8% were Germans and a smaller number of Dutch. The population included about 700,000 enslaved workers from Africa. As a side note, Benjamin Franklin complained there were too many Germans populating the colonies. His comment shows that fear of strangers and newcomers is a human flaw that is consistent throughout the ages and the world.

Although a majority of early settlers were English Pilgrims, Puritans, and Quakers, at the time of the Declaration of Independence, the [religious affiliation](#) of the Founding Fathers consisted of approximately 58% Episcopalian/Anglican, 19% Presbyterian, and 17% Congregationalists. George Washington was an Episcopalian/Anglican by birth. He later joined the [Freemasons](#) and espoused Deism. This religious diversity somehow is implicitly represented the 13 layers of the unfinished pyramid.

Circa 1845, a new wave of immigrants landed on the northeastern shores. They began to add to the religious diversity of the US. The new arrivals were mostly Irish Catholics who fled the devastation of the Potato Famine. They would soon be joined by what is called a ‘*flood of immigrants*’ coming from central and southern Europe, mostly from Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Poland, as well as a significant number of Jewish people from the European diaspora.

The majority of immigrants from Italy and Poland contributed to a growing Roman Catholic population. The Roman Catholic, Christian Orthodox, and Jewish immigrants added a religious diversity to the predominantly Reformed and Protestant denominations in the

country.

The reaction to the arrival of an increasing number of Catholics is reflected by an anecdote that occurred during the construction of the giant obelisk. It illustrates the ongoing fear of strangers and foreigners.

On March 8th, 1854, a block of marble given by Pope Pius IX as a tribute to the first US President and meant to be part of the giant structure, was stolen. The suspicion quickly pointed toward a group known as the Know-Nothings, a secretive, anti-Catholic political movement. The group had frequently expressed in the daily press their view that the stone sent by the Roman Catholic Church should not be a part of the Monument. The theft enraged Catholics in the US and abroad, and alienated part of the population from the funding of the Monument.

The Society in charge of the building fell at the hands of a political faction influenced by the Know-Nothings. It practically froze the progress toward the funding of the project. As a result, it interrupted the construction of the obelisk. At the resumption of work in 1879, the original material used at the beginning was no longer available. The different type of marble used for its completion left a scar at about 150 feet in elevation. It marks a reminder of the changes in the population makeup of the country and the evolving mosaic of the American people.

'E Pluribus Unum'

The flow of immigrants continued throughout the course of history and is reflected by the current US population, a mix that includes people from countries all across the planet. In New York City, [immigrants](#) currently use 192 different languages when they speak their mother tongue at home. In the Los Angeles metro area, the number is 185.

This type of diversity gives honor to the saying '*E Pluribus Unum*,' both with its explicit meaning, 'out of many states one nation,' and its implicit meaning, 'out of a multitude of immigrants of varied ethnic origins emerges an American cultural osmosis.' From this ethnic diaspora emerges common American values. They relate to the economic benefits of why immigrants move to US. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed during his journey in the country, Americans are not concerned by lofty ideals of virtue or righteousness. They are driven by self-interests and profits. It is this practical pursuit of economic benefit that underlines the American way of life.

James Madison, at the end of his life and seeing the changes undergoing the country, observed:

“In republics, the great danger is that the majority may not sufficiently respect the rights of the minority... Even the union of so many States is, in the eyes of the world is... a miracle.”

The Cost of the Union

During the years in which the words ‘In God We Trust’ were minted on US coins and Samuel P. Chase’s portrait appeared on the dollar, the country was in the midst of a Civil War (1861-1865). The War inflicted a level of human casualties that were beyond imagination. It is estimated that between 650,000 and 850,000 soldiers, mostly young men aged between 18 and 45 years old, died during the War. By some accounts, approximately 10% of the northern population and 30% of young southerners died as a result of the conflict.

The War raged on as the Industrial Revolution was transforming the economies of Great Britain and other countries of Europe. In the US, the conflict accelerated the reach of railroads, the building of steamships, favored the mass production of weapons, and popularized the use of novel technologies like the telegraph.

The increased demand for goods and munitions resulted in a great portion of the civilian population finding work in urban factories. The mobilization spread to financial and banking sectors in major urban centers like New York City. The conflict set the foundation of an industrial base ready for future 20th century conflicts.

The Union prevailed and the Civil War reinforced a political integration which underlined the idea that a common market that would spread dollar usage and allow it to later become the reserve currency of the world. The outcome would not have been possible without the unspeakable cost of human sacrifice for the benefit of future generations.

The use of the dollar expanded hand-in-hand with the development of the Industrial Revolution. During the latter part of the 19th century, cheaper fares and faster steam-powered boats increased the number of immigrants populating urban centers that provided labor for the steel, coal, textile, and garment industries. The rapid expansion of the railroad network system increased the mobility of people.

The ‘flood’ of immigrants and a growing population triggered a quest for affordable land further west to the Pacific shores and south to the Mexican border, expanding the limits of the homeland.

English: The American Idiom

On the bottom layer of the pyramid are inscribed the Latin numerical numbers of 1776. The nation's foundation rests on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The inscription reflects a symbolic transition of Latin to English. These two documents inaugurate and consecrate English as the '*lingua franca*' of the nation. Language, as a communication medium, is the single most important tool to facilitate and enhance economic transactions.

Citizenship programs were established across the country, and free English lessons were available in most major cities and towns. The Ford Motor Company, among other major businesses, kept immigrant laborers after working hours for mandatory courses to teach them English and instill American values. The Young Men's Christian Association also offered classes that taught immigrants the 'American way,' educating them on American hobbies, hygiene practices, family life, and more.

During the nineteenth century George Washington's image and the use of English was being officially commissioned by major institutions, corporations and by the policies of the capital. This is reflected by the number of artistic representations that endorsed Washington's premier status: The Monument, the Apotheosis, and the dollar. The goal was to honor the First President, and also help to promote and preserve political order and consistency, with the added purpose of educating the inflow of immigrants about the historical foundation of the nation.

The nineteenth century saw a rapid and widespread increase of economic growth and in the wellbeing of ordinary people that is unmatched in the history of the world. Most of it is the result of farming and mining that allowed the production of abundant foodstuffs and commodities.

The Donation Land Act of 1850 and the Homestead Act of 1862 provided 1.6 million people with 'free' land. The homesteading totaled about 10% of the nation's land mass area. The expansion of property ownership resulted in an increase of land values and people's wealth.

The new millennium will mark the coming of age of the United States

of America. No other country in history grew so powerful in such a short time span. The conquering and entrepreneurial spirit that inspired the settlers has survived and endured in succeeding generations.

The idea of ‘melting’ together as one nation began to emerge in the late 18th century. It embodied a slow progress of American values. The term emerged in order to promote harmony and help bridge the ethnic diversity of a growing population.

The idea is captured by the title of a play written by British writer [Israel Zangwill](#) that was first staged in Washington DC in 1908. “The Melting Pot” depicts the life of a Moldavian Jewish immigrant who fled his country to avoid being killed like his mother and sister by the Kishinev pogrom. President Theodore Roosevelt, who was present at one performance, expressed his approval by shouting, “that’s a great play, Mr. Zangwill.” His words reflected his administration program of ‘Americanization’ of immigrants that now included people from Eastern Europe and Russia.

In 1909, the play made it big in New York. Its success followed in other big cities. The content of the play was a bit controversial for its time as it portrayed the marriage of a Jewish man with a Christian woman. Intermarriage and the term ‘melting-pot’ would take decades to seep in as metaphor in popular American culture.

“America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races... are melting and reforming... — into the Crucible with you all!”

— Israel Zangwill

The Mighty Dollar

Immigrants coming from all over the world created a network of contacts from their respective countries of origin. They sent dollars back home to help out the family members they left behind. This form of distribution of money helped create an international network of contacts all around the world that spread the use of US dollars.

Growing urban areas attracted more and more immigrants that provided an essential labor force for assembly lines to produce cars, appliances, and all kinds of consumer goods for mass consumption. This enabled there to be a greater number of people making money, who could then spend it freely, fueling economic growth.

The trials and errors of early aviation became, over time, one of the most profitable industries in the US. The quasi monopoly of production and sales of commercial aircraft would expand the use of dollars throughout the industrialized countries of the planet.

Technological breakthroughs like the light bulb, electricity, and radio provided hard working people with modern manufactured goods, adding convenience to their everyday lives. These new products were promoted by an emerging and clever advertising industry enticing consumers to spend their hard-earned dollars.

Radio secured English as the language of the airwaves, setting a standard for the future of mass media. The production and distribution of movies introduced the 'star system' to the world by projecting American heroes onto screens viewed by audiences in the US and abroad, propagating the American way of life.

The introduction of movies converted the theater into secular temples where people with varied cultures and religions congregated. The entertainment industry established English as the language of the stars. In time, the medium side-stepped the established religious authority and introduced new models of behavior, mannerisms, and speech.

A good example of how American cultural identity developed is best illustrated by the story of two Jewish boys who came up with the idea of a comic book character who became one of the most popular American superheroes. The story begins with a child named Kal-El who travels from another planet to escape a threat on his life by an

evil force. He lands in a Midwestern cornfield where he is adopted by Jonathan and Martha Kent. The landed immigrant grows up to be a journalist named Clark Kent.

For Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegle, the creators of [Superman](#), the character reflects an idealized alter ego, an image of power to overcome the insecurity of being children of Jewish immigrants in a Gentile environment. They conjured up the idea of Superman, who is invincible and is endowed with superpowers, to defeat evil forces like the Nazis, who were set to annihilate the Jewish people in Europe. In time, both the readers of the comic book and the audience of the TV series and movies identified with the character and idolized Superman as an American mythical superhero. The medium is the message, and the underlying message is that Superman is a trademark and an emblem promoting the US' status as a superpower.

The history of immigration shows that urban centers were populated by varied ethnic and cultural groups that thrived within their own neighborhoods. American sports like baseball, basketball, and football helped bridge the boundaries that existed between these communities by attracting fans to stadiums where they would mingle and become one integrated audience, cheering on their respective sports club and favorite sports hero. Many of these sport stars also happened to emerge from these varied ethnical neighborhoods.

The Super Bowl and the World Cup are a metaphorical representations of a vessel, or stadium, that holds people together of different beliefs and ethnic origin. The bowl contains a mystifying audience called the American people congregated to celebrate a “[religion of sports.](#)”

The advent of television quickly brought TV sets into people's living rooms. The medium took center stage by providing news and entertainment to the masses. Mass media became the show case of the American way of life.

The Dollar and Post War Years

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was instrumental in adding the Great Seal on the dollar, was elected while the country was in the grips of the Great Depression. To help relieve the burden of a cyclical slump, FDR's administration proposed the New Deal. It included the creation of the National Housing Act and the Federal Housing Administration. One program consists the introduction of 30-year mortgage loan in the hopes of expanding affordability of home ownership to a great majority of Americans.

The housing market would eventually take off, but only after WWII. The expansion of home ownership was responsible for creating a real estate boom and a wealth distribution to a majority of the post-war population, similar in fashion to what homesteading did for the economy in the previous century.

The Second World War revived a dormant US economy, making it rev full throttle to supply munitions to the military fighting a war abroad. The soldiers shared American made products with the allied populations. These included music, chewing gum, soft drinks, and cigarettes, promoting US goods in the process.

The victory over the Nazis is followed in 1948 with the Marshall Plan that included loans and monetary aid totaling over 12 billion US dollars, equivalent to about 100 billion dollars today.

The financial aid was made to help countries recover from the devastation of war, and in turn expanded the circulation of US dollars in Western Europe. In return, post-war countries pledged to lift trade barriers, apply modern business practices, and contain the spread of communism. This plan, and the Breton Woods Accord, triggered the expansion of the dollar outside the US and the start of the notes' role as the reserve currency of the world.

The victory benefited not only the soldiers who made it safely back home but also the US economy in general, as well as the economies of Europe. The post-WWII years were responsible for the longest 'economic boom' which only ended with the recession of 1973. The historic expansion saw the outset to the Baby Boomers (1946-1964). The post-war years saw the birth of the greatest number of economically privileged Americans to date.

The 1960s saw a substantial increase of US dollars held in Europe and elsewhere around the world. The expansion of these financial obligations put constraints on the dollar. As a result, on August 15th, 1971, the US unilaterally abandoned its commitment to the Breton Woods Accord that had been in place since 1944. The end of the agreement resulted in the suspension of the dollar's convertibility into gold, replacing the gold standard with the dollar standard. The value of the dollar was left to rise and fall according to market demand, the health of the US economy, and the confidence in the capital's economic policy. The Breton Woods Accord inaugurated the dollar as a reserve currency of the world. Its cancellation de facto expanded its use.

Because the dollar was no longer backed by a physical and quantifiable precious metal like gold, the currency fluctuated wildly, creating uncertainty and inflation. This affected the price of imported items that were essential to the US economy, especially oil. The end of the accord contributed to the 'oil chock' of the early seventies. As a result, the price of oil quadrupled in 1973. In order to remedy currency volatility, an agreement was made with Saudi Arabia, the leader of OPEC, to peg the price of oil to the dollar. In return, these countries would benefit from a strong economy and use their dollars to purchase bonds, stocks, real estate, and military weapons.

The term 'petrodollar' was coined to reflect the agreement between oil producing countries and the US. What the deal means is that in order for any country to purchase oil from OPEC, they first need to purchase dollars, honoring the dollar as the reserve currency of the world.

The foreign exchange, called 'FX' or 'forex,' is the marketplace where countries from around the world exchange currencies. It is the largest market in terms of trading volume, surpassing the credit markets and the trade of goods and services. It is estimated that about 65% of the physical paper dollars in circulation are held outside the United States, mostly in \$100 notes. About half of the approximately \$5 trillion of transactions that are settled daily are denominated in US dollars.

American Civil Religion

As noted above, the motto 'In God We Trust' does not relate to any specific religious denomination, but conveys ideals of a civil order linked to varied symbols on the dollar. The implicit 'Trust' is about the economy that benefits all citizens. These dollars we routinely exchange everyday reflect an intrinsic confidence in the economy. Terms like '*Annuit Coeptis*' stands as a covenant of 'Trust' of the people in the government and its institutions relying on Providence's ongoing guidance in America's undertakings.

Agnostics and atheists may find the idea of an American civil religion, or any mention of religion or deity, objectionable. The reason may be that the term 'religion' has been associated with Christianity throughout the centuries. As described, the motto does not represent the God of the Bible. The deity on the dollar alludes to a political union and an economic reality, an attribute that reflects an invisible yet omnipresent dynamic that is hard to express in words except allegorically.

Whereas for Christian fundamentalists the description of a deity related to civil religion is likely to be considered heretical, even though the term 'religion' relates to a civic order and has a pagan origin. The sayings 'give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God' and 'in the world but not of the world' are appropriate considerations to be added here, in the sense that an individual's faith is not altered by being involved in the economy. It might also be inferred that there is no violation of the separation of church and state since civil religion does not constitute a church.

In a cultural environment where anything goes, the use of words like 'religion' or 'religious' may inspire feeling of uneasiness. The reason might be that a great number of people believe that we live in a predominantly secular culture emancipated from any moral constraints or guidelines. This type of mindset promotes the perception that to submit to an ethical standard would infringe on an individual's civil liberties. This uneasiness with civility and religion is oblivious to the fact that our contemporary world is dominated by celebrity cults that are partisan, sectarian, and divisive in scope.

At this point, some clarifications on the meaning of civil religion, and more specifically religion would be helpful.

Religion comes from the Roman *'religio.'* It relates to the proper rituals and ceremonies dedicated to the gods performed by mortals in order to maintain the beneficial order and prosperity of the citizens of Rome. Religion can be defined as that which removes or separates things and animals from the common use and transfers them to a special sphere through a meticulous execution of rituals and sacrifice. *There is no religion without this separation.*

Another well-known Roman concept that is closely related to *'religio'* is *'sacer,'* translated into 'sacred.' *'Religio'* and *'sacer'* do not refer to a union between mortals and the gods, but to what ensures that they remain distinct. When a commander performs an act of *'devotio'* (devotion) in order to secure a military victory, he consecrates and devotes his life to the gods. By doing so, he belongs exclusively to them.

"Roman jurists knew perfectly well what it meant to 'profane.' Sacred or religious were the things that in some way belonged to the gods. As such, they were removed from the free use and commerce of men; they could be neither sold nor held in lien, neither given for usufruct nor burdened by servitude. Any act that violated or transgressed this special unavailability...was sacrilegious... 'to profane' meant, conversely, to return them to the free use of men."

— Giorgio Agamben

The levitating pyramidion on the Great Seal is depicted as being removed or detached from the rest of the structure. This process is closely related to the function of religion and the sacred. It separates the capstone above the layers located below and gives it a special status symbolically, referred to as 'divine' or 'celestial.' The radiating eye was described by the original designer, William Barton, as the Eye of Providence, a design that was later modified by Charles Thomson, who changed the caption from *'Deo Favente'* (with God favoring) to *'Annuit Coeptis,'* it being a symbol of vision and divine guidance over the destiny of the United States of America.

In practice, *'religio'* is foremost civic, and implicitly political. It reflects the power of the gods being the eternal representatives of power, order, continuity, and hierarchy embodied by the mortal

rulers of Rome.

As a side note, the word 'religion' is not used in the Old Testament, and the few times the word appears, it relates to foreign belief systems considered heathen or pagan. It does not show up in the synoptic Gospels. The word is only used in later epistles influenced by the predominant Roman culture. What the Bible reveals is faith in the presence of the Almighty who communicates with individuals whom he sets apart to instruct, to lead, to prophesize, and govern God's chosen people, making sure they abide with the covenant he made with them and the commandments he gave them.

The term '*civil religion*' comes from the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract." Robert N. Bellah applied the title to the American political arena to outline the religious content of the inaugural speeches delivered by American presidents.

The idea of an American civil religion first came to Bellah's attention with John F. Kennedy's inaugural address on January 20, 1961. He noticed that his address was full of religious references to God and the nation, described in a very idyllic form. He also noticed that most of the past presidents' inaugural speeches had the same type of references: a call for devotion to the nation described in its ideal form, where divine Providence plays a guiding role in shaping the destiny of the United States of America.

Except for the references that allude directly to a biblical God, Bellah observes that the content of most speeches do not advocate any particular religious creed. There is no specific mention of Jesus Christ, Yahweh, or Allah, since the purpose of the discourse is to form a consensus and represent the multicultural aspect of the society to which they are addressed.

Yet, Bellah notes that among the first presidents, many also use references to the Bible. Especially to suggest a connection between the New World and Israel, the Exodus, the Chosen People, the promised land, and the New Jerusalem. These analogies, in the context of a predominantly Christian background of the first presidents, were inevitable.

Although Bellah acknowledges the connections with Judeo-Christian tenets, he carefully dispels any suggestions that American civil religion has any Christian doctrinal content, or is a substitute for

Christianity. He contends that civil religion has a different role than an institutional belief system, since it is specifically political. As such, it appeals to all of the people with their differing backgrounds. To Bellah, American civil religion is an understanding of the American experience in terms of a “transcendent ethical vision.” This interpretation of the universal and transcendental is only meaningful if made in relation to the origin and destiny of the US political model of freedom and democracy. Bellah further points out that the God of civil religion is a God of order and freedom rather than of love and forgiveness. It is a God mostly concerned with the history and destiny of the United States. American Civil Religion is civic. Its discourse is civil and eschews partisanship.

Civil religion has its holidays. Thanksgiving is a good example of a yearly ritual that has been celebrated throughout history by the American people to give thanks for a harvest of food shared with family and friends, and therefore a celebration that implicitly symbolizes the benefits provided by the economy.

It can be inferred that Christmas, once a strictly a Christian holiday, has been converted into a civil religious celebration of gift giving, an endorsement of a commercial enterprise. Today, Christmas has a dual function. On one hand, it is a faith-based celebration of the birth of Christ, and on the other hand, it is a business generated holiday.

The dollar displays symbols that convey cultural references from different sources. None of the symbols is singled out as more important than the other. They all contribute to a graphic makeup of the dollar. The most obvious disclosure of religion on the dollar is the word ‘God’ in the motto. As stated, this reference does not relate to any specific religion except for its monotheistic influence. However, the monotheism of the motto is not concerned with salvation, but with confidence in the role of money to act as a lubricant of the economy.

It might be added that the word ‘economy’ has a Greek etymology, meaning ‘household’ and ‘to manage.’ It was later translated into Latin and used by the early Church Fathers as the divine management of the world in terms of administration of a public treasury or patrimony. With the development of the Enlightenment, the word began to be used in its modern sense by deists like Voltaire and his contemporaries.

As noted above, there are references to Deism on the dollar, like the [All Seeing Eye](#), a symbol that is associated with Freemasonry, an organization that also espouses Deism. Several [Founding Fathers](#) were Freemasons and Deists. And the one dollar displays the portrait of the First President who was a Mason.

Freemasons

George Washington and President Franklin Roosevelt were both members of the brotherhood. Several signers of the Declaration of Independence were also members, namely Robert Paine, John Hancock, and Benjamin Franklin. Although many Freemasons played important roles in the history of the United States, they did not constitute a dominant influence. This is illustrated by the fact that a majority of historical figures displayed on all other Federal Reserve Notes were not Freemasons or Deists, and these bills don't have the Great Seal displayed on them but portraits of various buildings.

Many books have been written about the history of Freemasonry. Many of them describe their obscure origin, the secrecy of their rituals, or disclose varied conspiracy stories. Readers interested in the subject have plenty to choose from. However, the core principle of the Freemasons is that they believe in a Supreme Being and emphasize the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. They admit into their ranks men of every nationality, religion, and political persuasion. In order to join, a new member must be introduced by existing brethren. Members look after each other and help out members in need.

During the second part of the nineteenth century, the guild was part of a craze of associations, brotherhoods, fraternities, and women's clubs. Among the better known are Foresters, Odd Fellows, Illuminati, Knights of Columbus, Knights of Pythias, Rosicrucian, and Rotary International. The trend underlined an important facet of the American social fabric.

Like many other fraternities, the Masons played a crucial role in society by providing a platform for networking. An important aspect of Freemasonry was the secrecy about the identity of its members, a policy that attenuated prejudice between members of varied ethnic origins or religious denominations. As such, the Brotherhood was a center of networking that bypassed the human tendency to congregate within its own ethnic group and religious affiliation, acting against a natural propensity to segregate outsiders and strangers, creating networks that transcended cultural boundaries, and promoted political and business connections.

C. Moody Plummer, the author of "The Trestle Board," a monthly Masonic and family magazine published in 1897, explained that

Protestantism produced a religion of warring sects “as intolerant often of each other as human action can be,” while Masonry was “the only religion which can become universal and is [therefore] true religion.”

Reserve Currency

The Federal Reserve Note is commonly known as money. It is defined as a **medium** of exchange that guarantees the fulfillment of a transaction. Its value is generated by the confidence in the government and its institutions to manage the country and the economy in a trustworthy manner.

What helped make the US dollar the reserve currency is exemplified by the fact that a note issued in the 1860s is still a legal tender today, unlike the fate of many other currencies.

The Declaration of Independence introduced English as the language of a new political reality. The words displayed on the dollar promoted English as the language of commerce and business. A common language was essential to the growth of the US economy. In the course of history, Federal Reserve Notes have been accepted by the people as the official medium of exchange.

The identity of Americans has gone through many changes. It is an ongoing process. This identity is circumscribed by the principles outlined in the foundation of the United States of America as noted on the Great Seal, *‘E Pluribus Unum’* being one out of many. The motto implies one physical country populated by a mystifying union of immigrants from all parts of the world, beginning with the original settlers and evolving into the current population makeup, generating a cultural osmosis called the American people.

The saying *‘Novus Ordo Seclorum’* – ‘New Order of Ages’ – was later translated by politicians as the ‘New World Order.’ It describes the expanding reach of US military might and American corporations around the world. This power is reflected by the current status of the US dollar.

“Exorbitant privilege is also an invitation or temptation to lack discipline.”

— Paul Volcker

This strength of the dollar will inevitably cause dislocations to the world economy. When this happens, a reassessment about its status as a **reserve currency** will likely occur.

The US dollar is rich with symbols of varied origins. These symbols are open to historical and semiotic interpretation. What stands out from the history of the US dollar is that it takes time, human sacrifice, and political restraint to establish 'Trust' in a currency. This 'Trust' could easily be lost. Once it's lost, it will take time to regain.