

The 50 State Quarters Program: The Social, Political and Economic Influences on 10 Years of Design Choices



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Overview

"The United States Mint 50 State Quarters® Program (Program) has been hailed as the most successful coin program in the Nation's history. Authorized by Congress, the 50 State Quarters Program was an unprecedented ten-year initiative honoring the Nation's states" (50 State Quarter's Report)



❖ The 50 State Commemorative Coin Program Act authorized the program and was signed into law December, 1997.

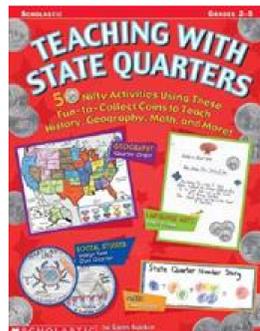
From January 1999-November 2008, the US Mint annually issued five commemorative quarters with reverse designs picturing something emblematic of each state.

- ❖ General guidelines established by the U.S. Mint to ensure appropriateness and coinability were that designs:
 - "should maintain a dignity befitting the Nation's coinage."
 - "should have broad appeal to the state's citizens and avoid controversial subjects or symbols likely to offend."
 - should reflect "suitable subject matter" such as "state landmarks (natural and man-made), landscapes, historically significant buildings, symbols of state resources or industries, official state flora and fauna, state icons and outlines of the state."
 - should not include State flags and seals.
 - "should promote the diffusion of knowledge of the state, its history and geography, and the rich diversity of our national heritage."
 - consisting of "enduring representations of the state" would be given priority consideration.
 - that included "logos or depictions of specific commercial, private, educational, civic, religious, sports or other organizations whose membership or ownership is not universal" would be considered inappropriate. (50 State Quarter's Report)



- ❖ States were given the discretion to choose their own selection process. In most states the Governor solicited submission of design concepts from its citizens and the process was overseen by an advisory group.
- In 33 States, the Governor was the one to select the final design, however in the other 17 states, citizens voted on the final design.

- ❖ Primary purpose of program: EDUCATION
 - * "...promote knowledge of individual states, their history and geography, and the rich diversity of the national heritage..."



Research Question

Are there any instances in which contemporaneous social, political, or economic issues may have affected the design choices of individual states?

Factors to Consider:

- > social, political,
- > economic climate
- > which states, if any,
- > are indicative? What mean?
- > political or personal agendas of those responsible (primarily) for final decision?
- > alternative designs that were considered, rejected or seemingly overlooked?
- > Potential for controversy



Process:

Step 1: I created a template for primary workups of each state

Example:

Illinois*

Released: January 2, 2003
Governor's Political Party: Republican
Design: Young Abraham Lincoln located in a farm scene, the Chicago skyline, and an outline of the state. Also has 21 stars-11 on left edge, 10 on right, and the captions "Land of Lincoln" and "21st State/Century".

"The Prairie State,' also commonly known as the 'Land of Lincoln,' pays tribute to our nation's 16th president. The young Lincoln lived and practiced law in Springfield before becoming one of our nation's greatest leaders. President Lincoln's historic home, burial site and new presidential library are all located in the Springfield area." [http://www.theus50.com/illinois/quarter.php]

Contemporaneous Economic/Social/Political Issues:

- Tax amnesty
- gun control
- death penalty [see "Governor Clears Out Death Row in Illinois," NY Times, nytimes.com/2003/01/12]
- typical political and economic issues such as Soc. Sec. reform, education, gay rights, etc. (conservative v. liberal)

January 2001 Governor George Ryan announced the Governor's Classroom Contest, beginning the period for public input. There were a total of 6,000 submissions (5,700 of which were from children). A 14 member committee appointed by the governor reviewed the ideas submitted and narrowed it down to three concepts that were forwarded to the Mint. They were:

- history
- agriculture and industry
- state symbols

The mint produced and sent back five designs based on the ideas. The final choice was made by the governor and is meant to represent Illinois's history and its future. [usmint.gov]



Determinations



Category One: States for which there was no apparent indication of

significant political, social or economic influence on the design choice. Determinations for these include discussion of:

- the nature and representative appropriateness of the design; supporting sources
- the absence of better alternatives and lack of controversy
- facts/circumstances indicating that such influences were not present

Example: Re Wisconsin (2004)- agricultural theme was unquestionably representative of the state – images are of the state's best known products and the foundation of its economy - no apparent controversy over the final choice - at the launch ceremony for the coin Director of the Mint, Henrietta Fore, said: "This new quarter proudly depicts Wisconsin as the dairy land of the Nation . . . It is a tradition of abundance and a gift from the heartland that the citizens of your great State have provided to enrich the Nation." [See usmint.gov, Press Release, October 25, 2004.] - a report to Congress from the Mint stated: "The Wisconsin quarter celebrates the state's pride in its agriculture." [US Mint, Report to Congress on Operations for the period of from October 1, 2004 to December 31, 2004] - other themes considered (e.g., "Old Abe," the eagle mascot of the Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War, or "the Badger" (which is the state animal) were not as good. – minimal economic influence - economy was improving and job growth in 2004 was the best in the Midwest and sixth best in the country. [Wisconsin.gov] - impact on economy from fear of outbreak of Mad Cow disease (which would have been catastrophic to the state) was prevented by the state's immediate response to the threat, including setting up one of the first identification programs for tracing livestock. The most interesting or "controversial" thing about the coin was that over 50,000 of them were minted with a mistake (an extra leaf on the ear of corn). Since those coins became more valuable there was an investigation and it was found to be just an error by a Mint employee. [usatoday.com, January 20, 2006]

Category Two

States for which research indicated that there were/may have been outside influences on the design choice; such states then required further more extensive research and workups)

For Example: Re California, **Possible Influences of the time:** [Note that California citizens did not vote directly on the final selection so the Governor had more influence and, likely, **personal agenda** to promote.]

- 1) Poor Economy
- 2) Public Education
- 3) The Environment



Step 3 Following general assessment, I researched and reviewed additional materials (newspapers, legislative and historical documents, etc.) on contemporaneous issues in

each state, formulated theories and made conclusions based

on the evidence as to the influence of the issues.

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