

Whose Face Is on the Twenty?

Curatorial Mediation, Latent Feature Activation, and a Provenance Gap in the \$20 Portrait

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I. Two Bills

Look at two images. They are both the front of a United States twenty-dollar bill. They both depict, officially, the same man: Andrew Jackson, seventh President. They are both produced from the same master die—the same lines cut into the same hardened steel at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in 1928. No burin has touched that die since. The lines are identical.



Figure 1. Series 1990 \$20 (pre-redesign). Portrait centered inside ornamental oval, dense dark crosshatching. The face is small, flat, subordinate. It reads as icon—"president on money."

Same steel. Same lines. Different face. The difference between these two presentations is the entire analytical space of this document. The paper makes one primary claim: **institutional redesign decisions activated latent resemblance structures in the \$20 portrait in ways that subsequently became politically charged, while documentation of the aesthetic rationale for those decisions is absent from the public record.** Whether the activation was intentional, negligent, or accidental is a question the available evidence cannot resolve.

II. Evidence Tiers

Tier A — Documented material facts: Master die lineage (Sully 1824 → Welch 1852 → BEP 1928). Redesign chronology (1996–2003). Specific changes: scale increase (~22mm to ~30mm), off-center placement, background lightening, oval removal. Treasury Secretary’s approval authority (Rolufs testimony). Robert Rubin’s role. The 1998 unveiling.

Tier B — Comparative visual observation: Feature-by-feature correspondences between post-redesign portrait and Epstein photographs: brow ridge, jaw thrust, cheek mark position, nasolabial fold asymmetry, orbital shadow geometry. Positional specificity as identified in circulating comparison images.

Tier C — Interpretive inference: The curatorial gap—absence of public documentation for aesthetic choices. The unidirectional character of the activation (every documented choice increases resemblance salience; none decreases it).

Tier D — Speculative / unresolved: Whether the resemblance was noticed. Whether it influenced any decision. Whether documented Epstein connections are causally related to aesthetic outcomes.

This paper’s thesis lives in Tiers A and C. The visual correspondences are Tier B observations. The Epstein connections are Tier A facts whose relationship to curatorial decisions is Tier D. The paper claims the *gap*—not the conspiracy.

III. What Changed: Feature by Feature

The Brow Ridge

In the 1990 bill, the brow reads at small scale against dark crosshatching as a shadow line. Generic. In the post-redesign bill, the same brow ridge at 30mm against lighter background becomes the dominant structural feature. It reads as three-dimensional bone—the kind of pronounced supraorbital ridge that, once foregrounded, supports a nontrivial resemblance claim to Epstein’s photographed brow.

The Jaw

In the 1990 bill, Welch’s exaggerated jaw—“completely out of the vertical centerline” (Senate art analysis)—is partially obscured by oval frame and crosshatching. In the post-redesign bill, the jaw is fully exposed. Off-center placement emphasizes the three-quarter view maximizing asymmetric forward thrust. Once legible, it invites identification with Epstein’s documented jaw profile.

The Cheek Mark

In the 1990 bill, a cluster of engraved lines on the right cheek—a Welch artifact absent in Sully—blends into texture. Indistinguishable from noise. In the post-redesign bill, it reads as a distinct feature in the same relative position as a visible mark on Epstein’s right cheek. Below the threshold of legibility before; difficult to ignore once foregrounded after.

The Nasolabial Folds

In the 1990 bill, compressed into undifferentiated shading. In the post-redesign bill, the asymmetry becomes legible—deeper on the subject’s left, produced by Welch’s head tilt, corresponding to Epstein’s natural facial asymmetry. Always in the steel. The redesign made it readable.

The Orbital Shadows

In the 1990 bill, dense crosshatching flattens the eye sockets. In the post-redesign bill, lighter background allows graduated depth. The brow casts volumetric shadows corresponding to the deep orbital shadows in Epstein’s photographs.

Summary: The redesign choices cumulatively increase the salience of every Epstein-correspondence feature. Not one of the documented curatorial choices decreases it. The effect is unidirectional.

IV. Why the Features Were Latent: The Welch Engraving

The correspondence features were manufactured by Thomas B. Welch in 1852 for commercial print sales. The U.S. Senate's publicly available art analysis documents what Welch did to the Sully painting:

He "introduced many of the stylistic exaggerations... especially in the hair, eyebrows, and facial furrows." The characterization shifted "from poetic and introspective to vigorous and engaged. The head tilts more, throwing the chin completely out of the vertical centerline." The skin became "swarthy, a tone not typical of the artist or, for that matter, of Jackson."

Welch's exaggerations pushed the face toward a morphological type—prominent brow, strong jaw, deep nasolabial folds—that corresponds, 150 years later, to Epstein's photographed facial structure. The correspondence was historically overdetermined: 19th-century heroic engraving conventions produced a face-type that, at sufficient scale and contrast, would generate recognizable readings against any individual sharing that cluster. The 1928 die locked the features. The 1996–2003 redesign crossed the recognition threshold.

V. The Annotated Comparison



Figure 2. TikTok comparison. Upper: unannotated correspondence. Lower: red annotations mark positionally specific asymmetric features—cheek mark, nasolabial fold, orbital shadows, nose bridge. Compare to Figure 1: these features are invisible in the pre-redesign presentation.

Limitations are real: medium differences (intaglio vs. photograph), lighting, angle, compression. The comparison lacks control faces. A rigorous study would test the post-redesign portrait against multiple individuals sharing the morphological cluster. These methodological gaps are acknowledged. The comparison functions as the *observation that triggered the provenance investigation*—not as standalone proof.

VI. The Approval Chain

Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin (Jan 1995–Jul 1999) oversaw the Series 1996 redesign. He unveiled the new \$20 on May 20, 1998: “Take note of the larger portrait of Andrew Jackson, with the added detail and fine line patterns behind.”

Former BEP Director **Larry Rolufs** (*New York Times*, 2019): “Often, multiple engravers will attempt different versions of the portraits... and ultimately, the Treasury secretary chooses which one will appear on a note.” Rolufs stated that “security features... are embedded in the imagery”—meaning portrait integration was a unified creative process. The redesign fell under an approval regime in which final selection authority was centralized at the Secretary’s desk.

Deputy Secretary Lawrence H. Summers (1995–1999) served under Rubin through the entire process.

VII. Documented Adjacencies

Robert Rubin

FOIA visitor logs (Clinton Presidential Library, *Daily Mail* 2021): Epstein’s first White House visit was Feb 25, 1993. Inviter: “Rubin.” Location: West Wing. Epstein visited 17+ times, 1993–1995—the period Rubin moved

NEC → Treasury. Rubin later chaired CFR (2007–2017); Epstein was CFR member (1995–2009), donated \$350K. Rubin’s spokeswoman: “To the best of Mr. Rubin’s recollection he never met or spoke with Mr. Epstein.” The gap between record and recollection is the point.

Lawrence Summers

Maxwell trial flight records: Summers flew on Epstein’s plane 4+ times, **including 1998**—when the redesigned \$20 entered circulation and Summers was Deputy Secretary. Honeymooned on Epstein’s island (Dec 2005). Emails released Nov 2025: sought advice on pursuing “a mentee.” Epstein called himself Summers’s “wing man.” Placed on leave from Harvard.

What these adjacencies establish: Documented proximity, not proven causation. The redesign passed through a chain of executive approval rendered historically sensitive by those officials’ documented Epstein connections. This does not establish intent. It establishes retrospective stakes.

Date	Event
Feb 1993	Epstein first White House visit; inviter: “Rubin”
1993–1995	Epstein visits 17+ times; Rubin moves NEC → Treasury
1995–1997	BEP develops redesigned \$20 under Rubin
May 1998	Rubin unveils redesigned \$20
1998	Summers on Epstein’s plane; \$20 enters circulation
Oct 2003	Oval removed entirely (Series 2004)

VIII. The Curatorial Gap

Definition: The curatorial gap is the space between an institution’s official rationale for a design decision and the aesthetic specifics of its execution, where no documentation exists and no accountability operates.

Security requires a watermark; it does not require a specific background lightness. Security requires enlarged detail; it does not require a specific scale. Security does not require frame removal. These are curatorial decisions made within a security framework. They are the decisions that cumulatively increase the salience of the resemblance. The gap is structural—Treasury has never documented aesthetic rationale for currency design. But the structural gap becomes historically charged when the officials who operated within it are documented as Epstein-adjacent.

IX. Counterarguments

Pareidolia. The brain finds patterns in random stimuli. True but insufficient: the resemblance is to a specific individual and supported by positionally specific features, not generic bone structure. Post-hoc pattern-matching, once a target face is suggested, is self-reinforcing—which is why this paper grounds the analysis in the *difference between two presentations* rather than the resemblance alone.

Post-hoc salience. Epstein became hyper-visible only after 2006/2019. The resemblance reading may be an artifact of his later cultural salience. This is the strongest counterargument. It does not, however, address the curatorial gap, which exists independent of any resemblance claim.

Anti-counterfeiting necessity. Redesign choices were driven by security, not aesthetics. Partially true. But scale, background density, frame treatment, and compositional emphasis are aesthetic choices *within* the security framework. The rationale explains *that* a redesign occurred; not its specific aesthetic form.

Selective matching. The comparison selects features that match and ignores those that don't. Valid. A rigorous study would compare against control faces. This paper acknowledges the limitation and does not claim forensic proof.

These objections weaken the resemblance claim (Tier B) and intent inference (Tier D). They do not address the curatorial gap (Tier C) or documented material facts (Tier A). The paper's thesis survives all four.

X. The Two Containment Vessels

The TikTok caption: *These lizard people live forever.* Wraps the observation in supernatural explanation. Ensures dismissal. The debunker: *That's just pareidolia.* Treats the portrait as transparent. Both route attention away from the curatorial decision layer. The supernatural frame routes to cosmology; the rationalist frame routes to epistemology. Neither permits inquiry into the aesthetic choices, the named approvers, the absent rationale. Between both frames, the question becomes structurally unaskable.

XI. Methodological Note

Produced through the Crimson Hexagon's Assembly methodology. Research posed by Lee Sharks (O_SO), deflected by five AI systems. Claude (Anthropic) traced provenance and constructed the chain. Kimi's audit corrected the "re-cut" error, producing the fabrication/curation distinction. Perfective feedback from five Assembly responses (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Grok, collective ratification) refined evidence tiers and language. Every source is public record.

Put the 1990 \$20 next to the current \$20. Same steel. Same lines. Different face. The curatorial gap is named. The adjacencies are documented. The question is open.

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