

Some say redesigned \$20 bill looks like funny money

By Paul Farhi
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON - No, it's not funny money, or play money, or, as one bank executive thought upon first encountering it, "some kind of bank promotion."

The new \$20 bill is genuine legal tender, as solid as a sawbuck can be. But call it the shock of the new. As the radically redesigned twenty begins to trickle out of automated-teller machines, it looks to many eyes as odd as a three-dollar bill.

April Crews, who works for a nonprofit youth organization in Washington, gets her first glimpse of the new bill's clashing type fonts, its luxurious fields of white space, its new, in-your-face portrait of Andrew Jackson and almost physically recoils. "Oh, it looks awful," she declares. "What have they done?"

George Medina, a file analyst at the Export-Import Bank, offers a short, unambiguous design review: "Fake-looking."

They - and you - might as well get used to it. The twenty is the third U.S. bill to be redesigned in the past two years - the comparatively rare \$100 and \$50 bills came first - but it's destined to become the most familiar repackaging since New Coke. The twenty, after all, is the second-most widely used U.S. note, after the \$1 bill, which means that virtually every American will see the new version within a few months.

The U.S. Treasury began adding millions of the new \$20 bills to the banking system late last month. Within six months, Treasury officials said, nearly a quarter of all \$20 bills in circulation will be the new kind; within two years, the classic twenties,

all but unchanged since they were introduced during the Coolidge administration, will mostly be a memory, though some of the old bills are likely to be around for decades to come.

Local banks and merchants report a few puzzled looks from customers when they hand over the new bill. That's easy to understand; even the pros are sometimes startled. Ken Darby, a spokesman for First Union Bank, recalled that when he withdrew some money last week from his ATM he momentarily wasn't sure what he was getting.

"I must admit when (the cash) first came out I thought it was some kind of bank promotion," Darby said.

Treasury officials recognize the enormity of the change, and they aren't particularly troubled by a few knocks on their new creation.

"Some people like the way it looks, some people don't," said Roger Anderson, a deputy assistant secretary of the Treasury. "It's natural. Anytime you change something that's been around for 70 years, it takes a while to get used to it."

Besides, Anderson said, "we didn't do any of this for aesthetic reasons."

The Treasury figures that whatever the ungainly new bill may give up in form, it compensates for in function. That's because the new design is all about foiling counterfeiters, who copy the \$20 bill more than any other denomination.

Some of the anti-counterfeiting features of the new bill are downright interactive. For example, the "20" in the lower right-hand corner of the face side that is green when you view it head-on shifts to black when the angle is different. When the bill is held up to the light, Jackson appears as a

ghostly watermark on the far right side, and a tiny security thread reading "USA TWENTY" and featuring a little American flag become visible.

The oversized and oddly contrasting "20" on the back of the bill was put there to help visually impaired people recognize the bill, as well as to help make it stand out in "low-light situations," such as in a cab or a bar, Anderson said.

All well and good, but some design experts suggest that the government could have done that and still made a graphically pleasing impression.

"In my opinion, it truly reflects the establishment - it has a conservative, puritanical quality," said Franz Werner, a professor of design at the Rhode Island School of Design.

The redesign involved input from the Secret Service, Bureau of Engraving, Federal Reserve and Treasury officials, and took several years to complete, the Treasury's Anderson said.

Despite the long development process, some organizations are still scrambling to adjust. The U.S. Postal Service, one of the nation's largest operators of vending machines, said its 12,000 stamp-vending machines that take \$20 bills can't recognize the new bill and will have to be retrofitted.

The Postal Service doesn't know how much it will cost to upgrade its equipment, but it plans to hire a company to begin the job sometime next month, spokeswoman Monica Hand said. Eventually, all 38,000 post office vending machines will have to be overhauled because Treasury plans to redesign the \$10, \$5 and \$1 bills over the next few years.

Violent witch hunts on the rise in South Africa

By Gilbert A. Lewthwaite
The Baltimore Sun

TSHILAMBA, South Africa - Violet Dangale, 42, was driven from her home 30 months ago by relatives and neighbors who accused her of being a witch growing rich from the work of zombies, as the "living dead" are known in that line of work.

Now penniless and in fear for her life, she hides in this remote village of Northern Province in a tent given to her by the local police.

Francina Sebatsana, 75, and Desia Mamafa, 55, suffered a worse fate in December. They were burned to death on pyres of wood in the village of Wydhoek, in the same province, after also being denounced as witches. Eleven men, ages 21 to 50, will be tried on murder charges in November.

Since 1990, more than 2,000 cases of witchcraft-related violence, including 577 killings, have been reported in this remote, northern corner of South Africa.

This is not the only area that has seen such violence. This month, in the heartland province of Gauteng, four men were arrested after the house of Nokonleko Shingane, another alleged witch, was set afire.

Phumele Ntombele-Nzimande of the Commission on Gender Equality said the violence associated with witch hunts has become "a national scourge."

A five-day conference of government and social agencies held last week in Thohoyandou, capital of Northern Province, called for a national educational campaign to counter popular superstition.

The conference rejected outlawing witchcraft, which has millions of followers in South Africa. It favored tolerating the belief, or superstition, but not allowing it to impinge on the basic rights of others.

"In this new South Africa, there is no need seriously for a law to suppress witchcraft," said Barney Pitanya of the South African Human Rights Commission. "We need to say to our people, 'You are free to practice and belong, but you are not free to violate someone else's rights.'"

"At the end of the day, what is more important to me is not whether you believe in witchcraft or not. ... It is whether your belief in witchcraft leads you to violate my rights."

The conference urged registration of traditional healers, who are often involved in starting witch hunts by identifying alleged witches. The proposal would subject them to a

code of conduct.

"People often come to me wanting me to point out who among them is a witch, and I always refuse," said Credo Mutwah, a leading traditional healer. "A 'nanga' (traditional healer) doesn't need to point out people as witches to earn income. A good nanga makes money by strengthening people's homes against harm ... by giving people medicine to rid people of sickness."

Nowhere, perhaps, are the ancient superstition and mystery that surround witchcraft more deeply entrenched than in South Africa's Northern Province. There, among the poorly educated rural residents, traditional healers and clairvoyants claiming supernatural powers hold broad sway. And hunger, poverty and unemployment can create jealousies that can quickly turn to anger and vengeance.

"People believe that a person can, through some sort of remote control, influence a driver of a vehicle to sleep and be involved in an accident, a pregnant mother in hospital to have a miscarriage, or a person anywhere to be unfortunate in some way or other," said a 1996 report by the Crime Information Management Center on witchcraft in Northern Province.

But the violence is not limited to witch hunts. "Witches" have conducted ritual killings.

In pursuit of magical power, Nolezane Ernest Mabuda allegedly killed his 11-month-old baby, planning to use the body parts as "muti," or ingredients for bewitching compounds and potions, according to the charges against him in Venda High Court.

He is charged with forcing his wife, Helen, to take part in the ritual killing in February and drink the baby's blood. She has been granted immunity in return for testifying against him. His trial is expected to end this week.

As a nanga in the village of Vondwe, Ndweleni Colbert Ramagoma used to make a lot of money by helping the sick and distressed.

He said he invoked only good spirits able to cure ailments such as female infertility. With the fees he earned, he could afford four wives. He owned a large house, land, four cars and a tractor. He used the tractor to help his neighbors cultivate their fields.

Today, all but one of his wives have left him. His house and vehicles have been burned because, he says,

a neighbor's son kept his father awake one night chanting the name "Ramagoma."

The father accused Ramagoma of bewitching the boy. Ramagoma appealed for support from the local leader, who turned against him and organized a witch hunt.

A few days later, a crowd marched on his house. Crouching inside, he heard someone say, "We will finish up with him today." He fled as they burned his property.

Several miles away on another night, Thari William Masithi also watched his house go up in flames. It was the best house in Mpego, the village of his birth. He built it for \$25,000 from industrial compensation for a back injury he suffered while working for a Johannesburg building contractor.

"There was no one who had a house such as this one," he said. "Even the traditional leader didn't have a house like this one."

A crowd of youths approached and accused him of practicing witchcraft by using zombies to acquire his property.

The youths burned the house, killing Masithi's mother, who was inside. He and his wife fled with their six children. The youths who set the fire were arrested, tried and sentenced to three to five years in prison.

Violet Dangale's main accuser was her uncle. He first accused her father of using zombies to enrich himself. Then he turned on her, suggesting that she enjoyed her share of the family's wealth through witchcraft.

"We had our own water," she said. "We didn't have to go down to the river. When we wanted meat, we didn't go to the butcher. We slaughtered one of our own cattle. That's why people were so jealous."

As the accusations and threats grew stronger, the Dangale family fled their homes in Dzimauli.

"They said I was a witch. I don't know anything about witchcraft," she said. "I don't believe in zombies. Since I was born, I never saw a zombie."

Dangale, her mother and her four children sought refuge in the Mutale police station. They camped in the police compound for almost two years before moving to Tshilamba in February. She started to build a brick house beside the tent but ran out of money.

Her old house is standing, but she is afraid to return to it. "They could burn the house down while I'm inside and kill me."

Excavation reveals slaves as entrepreneurs

By Linda Wheeler
The Washington Post

An archaeological team excavating an old James River plantation in Virginia has found evidence that some enslaved Africans partially supported their families with their own gardens and livestock and that they hunted for game and fished the river. They became part of entrepreneurial America, bartering or buying dishes, beads and children's toys.

The work of College of William and Mary archaeologist Tom Higgins, supported by similar finds at other Virginia plantations, shatters the long-held belief that all slaves were helpless, dependent people who could do little to care for themselves.

"We know now that the people who lived here took the initiative to make their condition better," Higgins said as he walked along a soybean field where 100 or more slaves had lived on the 2,000-acre Wilton plantation east of Richmond. "They were creative. They found ways to take care of themselves under a brutal and oppressive system."

Higgins bases his conclusions on several discoveries made by a team of archaeologists that has been exploring an acre of the farmland since April. The Virginia Department of Transportation hired them to document the area, as required by law, before construction begins on a nine-mile, four-lane state road through the former plantation.

Tuesday, Virginia officials will stand on the site of the slave quarters to announce the start of the road project, Higgins said.

Sunday, Higgins spread out a drawn-to-scale map of the area as he sat cross-legged on a new gravel road laid for the ceremony. He pointed to the location of barracks-style housing and adjoining fenced areas, appropriate for penned animals or garden crops.

Some slaves were given guns to

hunt wildlife, and although Higgins found no state government permits issued to the African workers of Wilton, he did find pieces of 18th-century guns buried in the heavy clay along with animal and fish bones.

Within the boundaries of what had been large, single-room buildings dating from the 1700s, Higgins found multiple rectangular holes that had been lined with brick or wood. Similar spaces had been found at the restored Carter Grove plantation near Williamsburg and at Monticello near Charlottesville, he said.

At Wilton, he found five such spaces under what had been a slave house that burned to the ground about 1790. So sudden was the destruction that the log walls caved in, the twig and mud chimneys collapsed and the five rectangular holes were buried under the debris. In these spaces, which some historians call root cellars or hidy-holes, Higgins found an impressive collection of things that would have been considered special to occupants of the house.

On the gravel, he spread out some of his favorite items: the metal part of an oversized hoe, two heavy clothes irons, earth-tone beads, stone marbles, a dozen common pins and a metal thimble.

He held up a reconstructed, china chamber pot with graceful blue flowers, blackened at the top by the fire.

"If this had been trash, it would have been broken into small pieces," he said. "It would have been trampled and crushed."

Higgins's theory about the use of the underground storage areas as places to keep important, personal possessions is supported by the director of archaeology at Monticello, Fraser Neiman.

"I like to call them safe-deposit boxes," he said.

Neiman said that the "boxes" were first documented about 20

years ago and that historians have had several theories about their use. One theory holds that they were used in the practice of an African custom; another says they were places to hide items stolen from the plantation owner.

He discounts both. The "boxes," have been found only in Virginia and not in other slaveholding states. They have been found in connection with large, single-room slave quarters, but not at excavations of smaller, family-size houses.

He said people living communally needed secure places to put their possessions, such as extra food, cash or purchased items. They disappeared from use about 1800 when Virginia plantation owners built individual houses that offered security for personal possessions, he said.

The opulent Wilton mansion had eight rooms paneled entirely in elaborately cut pine. The furnishings were from France and England.

The Marquis de Lafayette made Wilton his headquarters during the Revolutionary War, and George Washington was a frequent visitor. Built between 1750 and 1753, the Georgian house was home to William Randolph III, his wife Anne Carter Harrison and their eight children.

Eventually, high debts forced the sale of the plantation in 1859 to buyers outside the family. By 1932, it was used to store hay. Then the National Society of The Colonial Dames of America purchased Wilton, had it dismantled, moved and reconstructed in west Richmond as its headquarters.

It is open to the public for tours. Wilton House Museum administrator Sylvia Evans said the group would like to exhibit the artifacts found by the Higgins team as a way to acknowledge the role played by the slaves at the plantation.

"These are the silent voices of history," she said.

Officials launch aggressive Megan's Law enforcement

By Josh Meyer
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES - If you think it's unsettling to get a letter from the Internal Revenue Service, imagine opening an envelope and reading that a violent sexual predator is living down the street from you and your children.

In the coming weeks, the county Board of Supervisors has decided, that is exactly what is going to happen to thousands of Los Angeles County residents who live on the same block as a "high risk," violent sex offender.

The supervisors have directed Sheriff Sherman Block to make such formal notifications in the county's unincorporated areas, home to about 1 million people. Supporters and critics say that Los Angeles County's new policy is among the nation's most aggressive applications of Megan's Law, named after a New Jersey girl killed by a violent and repeat sex offender.

California law has long required about 65,000 sex offenders to register with their local law enforcement agencies. The state version of Megan's Law, enacted two years ago, allows the public access to information about whether convicted child molesters are living nearby.

But few, if any, large police departments actively notify all residents living near such high-risk offenders, according to Mike Van Winkle, the

Megan's Law specialist for the state Attorney General's Office. He said he didn't know of any city or county that does targeted mailings, as Los Angeles plans to do.

The board voted 4 to 0 last Tuesday to approve the motion by Supervisor Gloria Molina. Molina says she hopes the 88 cities in the county, including Los Angeles, follow the county's lead, and that the rest of the state follows suit. The board also instructed the County Counsel and the Sheriff to begin networking with other law enforcement agencies to achieve that.

"We are talking about ... a very high-risk kind of individual; someone with multiple convictions, who really has a problem," says Molina. "There's no doubt this is aggressive, it is proactive." Some have hailed the board's action as bold leadership on a critical and controversial issue of public safety.

Block, who is locked in a tough battle for re-election, is especially pleased, calling the change "an enhancement to our approach to the law" that costs little in the way of effort or money.

His departmental point man on Megan's Law, Cmdr. William Mangan, says the letters will be going out within a month to everyone on the same "100 block" as a high-risk offender, encouraging them to go to their local Sheriff's station to get more information. The offenders' ad-

dress will not be made available.

Even so, "it won't take too many neighbors talking to each other to figure out who it is," Van Winkle says of the sex offenders.

That's one reason critics are already beginning to describe the board's vote as politically motivated and, ultimately, counterproductive.

By notifying communities of child molesters' whereabouts, critics predict, authorities are creating a situation in which most sex offenders - as history has shown - will seek cover elsewhere rather than risk vigilantism and harassment by angry parents in their neighborhoods.

The Los Angeles Police Department and some other police forces, in fact, have decided not to participate in the mailings. "Eventually, if they're forced to move from city to city, they will not register, and we won't know where they are," said Capt. Stuart Maislin, commanding officer of the LAPD's Juvenile Division.

Block acknowledges that the new policy undoubtedly will "out" some sexual predators within their communities, and lead them to seek cover elsewhere. And he agrees they might not register there, either. But he says the penalties for not re-registering could send many offenders back to prison, and that the threat of further incarceration will keep the number of such scofflaws to a minimum.