

Americans No Longer Live Up to the Hidden Messages on Their Coins

Old coins are one of the closest things we have to buried treasure these days. There's a thrill in finding something rare and valuable. I experienced that thrill every time I found a wheat penny in the jug of coins I sorted through one hot summer afternoon as a 10-year-old. My sister likely had a similar thrill upon finding a silver dime in the backyard, a find made even more sweet after watching a neighbor's fruitless efforts to turn up coins along the public boulevard with a metal detector.

Yet coins offer much more than thrills or monetary value. They also offer a glimpse into a society's culture. That's the message [Anthony Esolen presents](#) in the April/May issue of *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*.

Among the many coins Esolen discusses is the Winged Liberty dime. Launched in 1916, the dime features Miss Liberty wearing a "Phrygian cap," which Esolen describes as "a classical symbol of freedom." However, designer Adolph Weinman added a unique feature to this cap of freedom: wings. "Weinman said he wanted to craft an allegory for freedom of thought," Esolen notes.

While once a fitting symbol for American coinage, Esolen believes the image no longer applies:

"It occurs to me that we have inverted the Winged Liberty dime. Freedom of thought requires two things, to wit, freedom and thought. You cannot have freedom without virtue, said every Christian theologian as well as every pagan philosopher and statesman who ever lived. But we insist upon freedom from virtue, from manliness; and so we

end up with compulsions, surveillance, and confinement.”

An apt description for our time, is it not? Instead of honor, displays of virtue often receive public scoffing. Confinement aside, [compulsions](#) and [surveillance](#) were becoming a normal part of life before the global pandemic hit. Many believe these things will [only increase](#) as we grow used to a new normal in which the government watches our movements in the name of protecting our health.

Undoubtedly, we’d all like to have our freedom – both of movement and of thought – restored to us. But how do we get to that point? According to Esolen, it’s not easy to restore these freedoms, we must swim upstream and bow to ideas that aren’t considered “woke” or politically correct:

“You cannot have genuine thought unless you are in contact with reality: either the excellent world about us with all its salutary resistance to our wills, or the world as the great artists, poets, and thinkers from the past can present it to us. **Freedom of thought thus requires discipline, strength, and honest submission to truth.** Otherwise we are talking about license and fantasy, slack and effeminate; these come to us readily from the manipulations of mass education and mass advertising.”
[Emphasis added.]

Because of this, Esolen suggests the United States is in need of a new coin to picture the true state of its affairs:

“I propose a new Charon dime. It should feature on the obverse the head of a boy, listless, drooping, eyes half shut, an emblem of resigned captivity. On the reverse, a heap of scattered rods, I Ching wands perhaps, forming the 47th hexagram, the Swamp, an allegory of confinement and oppression. And a new legend engraved: TRUST PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE FBI.”

Benjamin Franklin [noted](#) that “Without Freedom of Thought, there can be no such Thing as Wisdom.” We live in a “post-truth” society. The question is, will we remain comfortable in that post-truth society, kissing Lady Liberty, freedom of thought, and wisdom goodbye, or will we buck the trend and embrace the discipline and virtue necessary to live in a free society?

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