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Quarter and Half Dollar Coins: History and Current Status

The Secretary of the Treasury, through the U.S. Mint, is statutorily authorized to issue specific denominations of circulating coins (31 U.S.C. §5112). Currently, the United States has six circulating coins—dollar, half dollar, quarter dollar, dime, nickel, and penny. All coinage is also required to have certain design elements, including specific words such as “Liberty,” or “E Pluribus Unum.” Since 1930, the Mint has redesigned the quarter dollar six times (1932, 1976, 1997, 2008, 2021, and 2022), while the half dollar was last redesigned in 1964. The Circulating Collectable Coin Redesign Act (P.L. 116-330) authorized future redesigns of the quarter and half dollar between 2022 and 2030.

Quarter Dollar Designs

The first quarters were issued in 1796 and depicted Lady Liberty on the (front) obverse and an eagle on the (back) reverse. Since then, the quarter dollar has been redesigned six times, with two future redesigns authorized by the Circulating Collectable Coin Redesign Act of 2020.

Washington Quarter

In March 1931, President Herbert Hoover signed a law (46 Stat. 1523) to change the design of the quarter dollar coin to commemorate “the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of George Washington.” The law required a portrait of George Washington on the obverse and “appropriate devices on the reverse.” The finished coin (as seen in **Figure 1**) had a “standard eagle” design on the reverse.

Figure 1. George Washington Quarter, 1932-1998



Source: U.S. Mint, “The History of U.S. Circulating Coins,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/history/us-circulating-coins>.

Notes: The reverse of the Washington Quarter was redesigned for the American Bicentennial in 1976. See **Figure 2**.

Bicentennial Quarter

In October 1973, Congress authorized (P.L. 93-127) the redesign of the quarter’s, half dollar’s, and dollar’s reverse to celebrate the bicentennial of American independence. The law required that the coins have two dates—1776 and 1976—and should “bear a design determined by the Secretary [of the Treasury] to be emblematic of the

Bicentennial.” **Figure 2** shows the Bicentennial Quarter and Half Dollar.

Figure 2. Bicentennial Quarter and Half Dollar, 1976



Source: U.S. Mint, “1976 Bicentennial Coins,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/kids/library/bicentennial-coins>.

50 State Quarters

In December 1997, the 50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act (P.L. 105-124) authorized changes to the quarter dollar to honor each state. The 50 state quarters were first issued in 1999 in the order that the states ratified the Constitution or were admitted to the Union, starting with Delaware. As initially enacted, the 50 state quarter program did not include the District of Columbia or the territories. On December 26, 2007, the quarter dollar program was amended to include the District of Columbia and the territories (P.L. 110-161). These quarters were issued after the 50 states, beginning in 2009.

America the Beautiful Quarters

In 2008, Congress authorized the U.S. Mint to redesign the reverse of the quarter to honor national parks and historic sites in each state, territory, and the District of Columbia. The America the Beautiful quarters were first issued in 2010. Five national parks or historic sites were featured each year. The program ends in 2021. Quarters were issued in the order that the national park or historic site was created. **Figure 3** shows the last America the Beautiful quarter, the 2021 Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site (AL) quarter.

Figure 3. 2021 Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site (AL) Quarter



Source: U.S. Mint, “Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site Quarter,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/america-the-beautiful-quarters/tuskegee-airmen-national-historic-site>.

Washington Crossing the Delaware Quarter

In 2021, at the end of the America the Beautiful quarter program, the quarter dollar featured George Washington on the obverse and a new image of General Washington Crossing the Delaware River prior to the Battle of Trenton on the reverse. **Figure 4** shows the Washington Crossing the Delaware quarter dollar issued in 2021. This design will also be issued during any period when Congress does not mandate an alternative design.

Figure 4. Washington Crossing the Delaware Quarter



Source: U.S. Mint, “General George Washington Crossing the Delaware Quarter,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/circulating-coins/general-george-washington-crossing-the-delaware-quarter>.

Prominent American Women

The Circulating Collectable Coin Redesign Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-330) authorized the Mint to issue up to five quarters each year between 2022 and 2025, to feature prominent American women in areas “including but not limited to suffrage, civil rights, abolition, government, humanities, science, space, and arts, and should honor women from ethnically, racially, and geographically diverse backgrounds.” **Figure 5** shows the 2022 American Women Quarters.

Future Quarter Designs

The Circulating Collectable Coin Redesign Act also authorizes two future quarter reverse redesigns. They are

- In 2026 to celebrate the semiquincentennial (250th anniversary) of the United States, with up to five different designs. At least one must be “emblematic of a woman’s or women’s contribution to the birth of the

Nation or the Declaration of Independence or any other monumental moments” in American history.

- Between 2027 and 2030, to feature images “emblematic of sports played by American youth.” Each will feature a single sport, with up to five sports celebrated each year.

Figure 5. 2022 American Women Quarters



Source: U.S. Mint, “American Women Quarters Program,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/news/image-library/american-women-quarters-program>.

Note: The 2022 quarters depict Maya Angelou, Dr. Sally Ride, Nina Otero-Warren, Wilma Mankiller, and Anna May Wong.

Half Dollar Designs

The half dollar coin was initially authorized in 1792. Since 1964, President John F. Kennedy has appeared on the obverse and an eagle on the reverse (except for a change to the reverse for the U.S. bicentennial). **Figure 6** shows the 2021 design of the Kennedy Half Dollar.

Figure 6. Kennedy Half Dollar, 1964 to Present



Source: U.S. Mint, “Half Dollar,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/circulating-coins/half-dollar>.

The Circulating Collectable Coin Redesign Act of 2020 authorizes the half dollar’s redesign between 2027 and 2030 to honor Paralympic sports with images on the reverse “emblematic of a sport tailored to athletes with a range of disabilities, including physical impairment, vision impairment and intellectual impairment.”

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