

# A TRUMP STAMP?

Can we expect to see a stamp featuring President Donald Trump any time soon?

Not sure. Could happen. It depends on the president.

I asked Google: Does President Trump want to be on a U.S. postage stamp? Here was my AI reply: "... While specifically appearing on a U.S. postage stamp is not explicitly confirmed, this branding effort aligns with his desire to have his likeness featured on various official items."

A friend suggested Trump would hesitate to put his face on something as old-fashioned as a stamp. Aren't stamps on the decline in use and popularity in this cyber-age? Why would Trump want to tie himself to this sinking whale?

It can take up to three years for a stamp to be proposed and go through selection, design and production. Setting the criteria is the work of the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee, a group of 10 to 15 experts that meets quarterly. It has received up to 40,000 suggestions for stamps each year, and recommends about 50 to the Postmaster General. It has been our custom since the first U.S. stamps appeared in 1847 to portray only deceased Americans. It's not hard to guess why. It would be undemocratic to publicize current political leaders, candidates or other self-interested parties, and improper to promote one living American over another.

At least that was pretty much the consensus up to now. In the second Trump administration, however, the president has embarked on a startling mission to stamp his brand on the federal flank. See the (Trump) Kennedy Center and the (Trump) Institute of Peace. He glowers from passports and national park passes. Giant banners bearing his image hang on the facades of the Departments of Justice, Labor and Agriculture.

If Trump wanted his face on a stamp, he probably could get it. There is no federal law that bars living people from being so honored. Just long-standing practice. Tradition. Custom, as it were.

There are no real obstacles Trump would have to overcome. The Citizens Advisory Committee's members are appointed by the Postmaster General. Their recommendations are non-binding. A compliant PG could stack the committee with friendly votes and fast-track a



Above and below: Mock-ups by FMF





Above and below: More FMF mock-ups

Trump stamp. The administration already has defanged the Kennedy Center board and the panels that are supposed to be watchdogs over White House renovation and monument plans.

Heck, the Postmaster General might as well just bull ahead, since the advisory committee has little authority anyway.

For a brief time, it turns out, there was an opening to honor living Americans on stamps. In 2011, during the Obama administration, the USPS interrupted its dead-only policy. The

Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee at the time laid out this abrupt policy shift: “The Postal Service will consider honoring living people who have made extraordinary contributions to American society and culture. ...”

The idea apparently was to create “buzz” with younger customers by featuring their favorite musicians and other cultural icons. This would sell stamps and make money for the always-strapped USPS. It sounded well-intentioned, if thoroughly nonsensical and unworkable. Then-Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe was upbeat: “This change will enable us to pay tribute to individuals for their achievements while they are still alive to enjoy the honor.” Stephen Kearney, manager, Stamp Services, added hopefully: “Engaging the public to offer their ideas is an innovative way to expand interest in stamps and the popular hobby of collecting them. We are inviting our customers to submit the top five living individuals they would like to see on stamps.”

No word how many suggestions poured in. But nothing happened. No living American was honored on stamps, and in 2018 postal authorities came to their senses and rescinded the policy. \*\*

Did debates rage within the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee? Was there partisan deadlock? Bloody selvage on the floor? All of this is possible, though we may never know, since Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee meetings are closed to the public.

The dead-only rule has been put in writing, and is spelled out in the revised criterion: “Living people will not be considered at the present time. Beginning in 2018, proposals for a deceased individual will be considered three years following his/her death. ...” This last may have been a face-saving gesture. Before the dead-only ban was temporarily lifted, the posthumous waiting period was five years, not three. So it looked like the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee was taking some action. What they really were doing was shutting the lid on Pandora’s Stamp Box.





Mock-ups, all

(By the way, there needs to be some housekeeping on the internet regarding this policy. Online references still say living people can be on U.S. stamps. Even Wikipedia clings to the since-abandoned USPS policy.)

While the latest rule may sound definitive, it is nothing of the sort. If the USPS could abandon its dead-only criterion once, it could do so again. A reckless, narcissistic president will not be deterred by established procedure and precedent from getting what he wants. If he wants to put his face on a stamp, there is no law stopping him. — FMF

\*\* There was a series of U.S. souvenir sheets issued in 2013 with stamps commemorating the Harry Potter movies, which of course featured performers who are still living. They were actors, though, not portraying themselves. Besides, they were British, right?

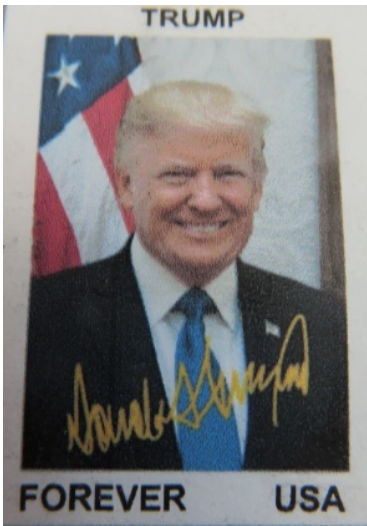
## Gallery



Other nations do not have the same rule against featuring living people on stamps. Here are selections from Togo, Sierra Leone, and Antigua and Barbuda, the latter offering a V.P. Vance stamp as well. You'll note these are pretty far-flung postal authorities. They issue stamps in their name produced by slick printers in Europe — stamps that have little to do with the country or actual postage. The stamps are shipped directly to dealers, or to the collector who is sucker enough to subscribe. Interestingly the stamp in the center above uses Trump's mug shot from the sheriff's office in Fulton County, Ga. If it's a legal 23 leone (about \$9) stamp, you may use it to mail a package in Freetown or anywhere else in Sierra Leone.



There are “cinderella” stamps with no postal value that are basically anti-trump propaganda. Above are a couple of examples.



Finally, here are items I culled from the internet that look like U.S. postage stamps but are really just proposed designs. The one on the right looks disturbingly convincing.

— FMF

