

THE WORD 'COMPLAINT' MUST MEAN SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO THE MINT

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How does the United States Mint define the word "complaint"?

The editors here wondered that after seeing Acting Deputy Mint Director David Motl's Nov. 17 response to two congressmen who want to know what the Mint is doing to combat the counterfeiting of precious metals U.S. coins. While Motl states in his Nov. 17 letter that the U.S. Mint takes counterfeiting very seriously, he claims that "in the past two years, we have not received any complaints about counterfeit cur-

rent issue gold, platinum or silver coins."

Coin World has informed the Mint of counterfeit American Eagle bullion coins on multiple occasions in the last few years as we prepared to write about the fakes in news coverage. Maybe informing the Mint of the fakes' existence does not count as a "complaint" in the Mint's view, but the implication given in the letter is that Mint officials are unaware of any such counterfeits of current precious metals coinage. We were not the only ones perplexed by

Motl's statement. Beth Deisher, former *Coin World* editor and now head of the Industry Council for Tangible Assets' Anti-Counterfeiting Task Force, also questions its accuracy. She writes that in a meeting with Motl on Nov. 9, "ACTF representatives informed him and other Mint staff of evidence of counterfeiters producing fake American Eagle, American Buffalo, and U.S. commemorative coins, all of which are composed of precious metals." I guess that the ACTF's presentation to Motl and other Mint staff members does not count as a complaint, either.

U.S. Mint officials must step up and get serious about fighting counterfeits. The production and sale of counterfeit U.S. coins is an assault on the economy of our nation, and needs to be addressed, and stopped, now. 

GUEST COMMENTARY

ATTRACTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE HOBBY IS POSSIBLE WITH SOME WORK

BY CHRIS BULFINCH

I write today to share my perspective on William T. Gibbs' editorial in November's monthly edition. I think that the choice to investigate effective means of attracting younger people to numismatics is an interesting and timely subject. The question about broadening the range of "serious" numismatic topics and pieces is also, I think, a very worthy topic.

I approach this question as a 21-year-old who has been collecting coins for 17 years and been reading *Coin World* since 2007. As a young numismatist, I can attest to the dearth of my peers in the hobby. Your argument that the rise of credit cards, online transactions, and money-moving services like Venmo has led to a drop in interest in numismatics is, in my view, sound and perceptive. From my perspective, I would also add the rise of social media and more technologically oriented hobbies as a causal mechanism of the scarcity of young numismatists; put simply, many young people gravitate toward activities that are either social or interactive in nature. The idea of poring over books and articles researching a particular series or individual coin, checking price lists, and learning about the minutiae of things like die varieties, toning, and grading do not have the sociality of social media or the instant gratification of video games or Netflix.

Having said all of this, I am of the opinion that my generation could still be attracted to numismatics. Though the internet is undoubtedly a double-edged sword for our hobby, it has allowed unprecedented access to infor-

mation vital for young collectors, and already serves as an effective medium for hobbyists to connect and share information. The real question, to my way of thinking, is how to leverage both the internet and more traditional numismatic forums in a way that engages younger people. To this end, I have a few suggestions.

Connecting to young people does involve, as you suggested, connecting to aspects of pop culture. Your suggestion that coins like the Ghostbusters piece you talked about in your article might interest younger people is reasonable; it's obvious that major movie and TV franchises want to merchandise, and integrating numismatics into popular consciousness in that way is not a terrible idea. Personally, I have never liked the colorized, pop-culture coins that you mention, for their lack of historical value and because I find them a vapid and shallow contribution to the hobby.

Many young people have the intellectual inclination toward "more serious" numismatics. I have noticed a pronounced interest in my young people toward a certain kind of material culture that could easily include numismatics; many millennials, myself included, buy vinyl records and other assorted examples of Americana. There is an interest in pedestrian items of the past, and coins could be a part of this preservationist cultural impulse. Moreover, coins as a part of social movements that figure into the millennial social consciousness could be another angle of approach; patriotic tokens from the Civil War, hobo nickels from the Great

Depression, or political buttons and memorabilia from the 1960s Civil Rights movement might all resonate with millennial sensibilities and inclinations toward social justice movements.

Integrating numismatics into young people's academic lives could also help ameliorate the shortage of young people collecting coins. More and more young people are interested in disciplines like history and American Studies at a graduate level, and material culture programs in both undergraduate and graduate programs could easily and effectively integrate numismatics into their curricula. An influx of bright young people with effective critical thinking skills into the hobby could only serve to make it more attractive. We sit, in my view, at a time when a sound understanding of history and an ability to reflect critically on its effect on the present is of paramount importance — coin collecting could in that sense become a valuable tool for producing more aware, engaged citizens.

Coin collecting has enriched my life in innumerable ways, and your piece reflects a concern that occupies my mind as surely as those of veteran hobbyists and professionals. Numismatics will continue to exist, and numismatists will remain as eclectic and engaged a breed as ever. Your suggestion that expanding the hobby to encapsulate a more diverse range of people with a broader array of interests is a good one, but I think that the core pillars of traditional numismatics can be made relevant to younger people; Lord knows they have resonated very strongly with me for the better part of 20 years.

CHRIS BULFINCH will graduate in May 2018 from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, with a bachelor's degree in history.