

# Slave Girl Births Promotion History

BY BERNIE TRUEBLOOD



**T**alk about a risky adventure.

Desperate for success after its flub with the Susan B. Anthony dollar coin, the U. S. Mint borrowed interest from yet another

historical celebrity: Sacagawea, the Native American credited with keeping the Lewis and Clark expedition afloat.

Now failure can tarnish both history and special interests. Fail it might, since there is scant evidence that consumers want to be weighed down by a “golden” dollar that contains no gold, especially when a lightweight paper bill remains an alternative.

Appropriately concerned, the Mint trod that trail blazed by legions of marketers who have feared for their product’s potential shortcomings, and turned to the promotion industry for deliverance.

The objective was apparently to build awareness and promote trial; the strategy to achieve fast, broad-scale circulation. The core concept was to partner with Wal-Mart, a sad commentary on the promotional credibility that the Mint gives to U. S. banks. Granted first dibs, the giant retailer reportedly committed to putting 100 million coins into circulation and featuring them promotionally.

Cool idea, but one unappreciated by America’s banks. As of this writing, the “golden” dollar is a rarity. It is simply not available at banks — hardly a contributory to faith in our monetary system. The problem is that 100 million is but a pittance in the Mint’s grand scheme to unleash one billion coins in Year I. Big as the retail chain is, there are only 2,970 Wal-Mart stores in the U.S., compared with 62,000 bank branches.

## CHEERIOS TO THE RESCUE

If one savvy consumer promoter is good, two must be better. Thus, the Mint turned to General Mills, that veritable powerhouse of packaged goods promotion. The national press reported that the deal would hurl another 11 million coins into circulation. Not quite.

True, 11 million boxes featured the offer, but a mere 6,400 boxes paid out in gold. The rest contained an in-pack premium in the form of a newly-minted “collectable” penny — one of a mere 18 billion that will be circulated this year.

Rarity aside, this promotion was imaginatively unique, and probably more appropriate for Cheerios’ new positioning as a cholesterol-cutter than is the typical toy offering. So give Cheerios an “A” for Creativity.

On the other hand, consider a “C” for Accuracy. Memo to Cheerios: Contrary to your package claim that Sacagawea “traveled with her baby on the Lewis and Clark expedition across the United States,” she actually gave birth en route. Further, she embarked from what is now North Dakota, traveling across the Louisiana Purchase and then Oregon Country, which became part of the United States four decades later.

Interestingly, this may not have been a planned vacation either: Historians suggest that Sacagawea may have been conscripted as part of a tour-guide deal Lewis and Clark cut with her significant other, Toussaint Charbonneau, a fur

trader who had either bought her from the Mandans or won her in a poker game — but that’s hardly the stuff for the back of America’s cereal boxes.

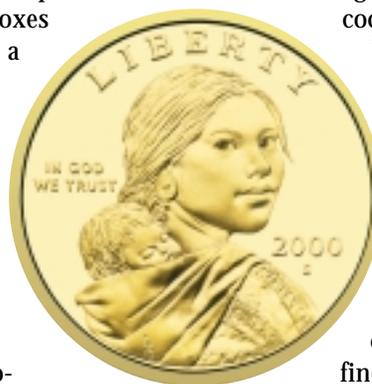
Mint partner Coinstar, too, leaves a little something to be desired in the accuracy department. Their pitch was like garnish on a desperation cocktail. Full-page print ads bleated that consumers could get two “golden dollars” when they cashed in \$20 in change at their local Coinstar machine.

These machines are located in many supermarkets. Search carefully and you might find one, or log onto [www.findcoinstar.com](http://www.findcoinstar.com) to locate the one nearest you.

Great idea, because a machine that handles coinage can simply dispense the dollars instantly, right? Not so fast — this machine only prints a redeemable paper certificate. OK, so consumers can redeem it for dollars right at the customer-service counter or — better yet — at the in-store bank, yes? Nope. It’s redeemable only by mail. Just imagine how many coins this will catapult into circulation!

Bottom line: The U.S. Mint must be saluted for adventurous creativity. Having snubbed the traditional channel, however, the golden dollar could find itself up the Missouri without a paddle.

That’s the truth.



*Fool’s gold or golden calf?*

*You can share your two cents with Bernie Trueblood at [btrue@promoprimer.com](mailto:btrue@promoprimer.com), or prove him wrong by sending him a golden dollar in care of **PROMO Magazine**.*