

Groundbreaking Episcopal priest Pauli Murray to be featured on US quarters

by [Egan Millard](#)

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(Photo from the Carolina Digital Library and Archives)

Pauli Murray, the first African American woman to be ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church and a pioneer in the struggles for racial and gender equality, will be featured on US quarters in 2024, the [US Mint announced](#) on February 1. She and four other women are being honored next year as part of the Mint's [American Women Quarters](#) series, celebrating the contributions of women to United States history.

Murray, whose feast day is [celebrated on July 1](#) in the Episcopal Church's calendar of saints, was also a lawyer, writer, and co-founder of the National Organization for Women. Often the first or only Black woman in the positions she held, Murray was a groundbreaking leader in the civil rights movements of the 1960s, though her contributions were long overlooked.

She is being honored along with Patsy Takemoto Mink, the first woman of color to serve in Congress; Mary Edwards Walker, a Civil War surgeon, women's rights advocate, and abolitionist; Zitkala-Ša, an advocate for Native Americans' right to US citizenship; and Celia Cruz, the Cuban American "Queen of Salsa." The quarter designs will be unveiled this summer, the Mint said.

"All of the women being honored have lived remarkable and multifaceted lives, and have made a significant impact on our nation in their own unique way," Mint Director Ventris C. Gibson wrote in the announcement. "The women pioneered change during their lifetimes, not yielding to the status quo imparted during their lives. By honoring these pioneering women, the Mint continues to connect America through coins which are like small works of art in your pocket."

The [American Women Quarters program](#) began last year and will continue through 2025, with the Mint issuing five quarters each year.

Murray, who was ordained in 1977, was a largely unsung hero until the 2021 film [My Name Is Pauli Murray](#) brought her story to an international audience. Fifteen years before Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to White passengers on a bus, Murray and a friend did the same in Virginia, though their case did not gain momentum the way Parks's did.

In her legal career, Murray was among the first to argue the unconstitutionality of "separate but equal" laws, an argument cited 10 years later in *Brown v. Board of Education* by Thurgood Marshall, the civil rights attorney who later became a Supreme Court justice. Marshall called Murray's book on segregation laws "the bible of the civil rights movement." And Ruth Bader Ginsburg used Murray's arguments in a legal brief she wrote—listing her as a co-author—while arguing *Reed v. Reed*, the 1971 Supreme Court case that banned gender discrimination based on the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause.

Murray was queer, though her specific identity within the LGBTQ+ community [has recently been debated](#), with some arguing that she should be considered nonbinary or a transgender man. Her stature has recently grown [among the US public](#) and in the Episcopal Church, where Black and queer leaders today [recognize her as a major influence](#). —Episcopal News Service