



THE COALITION OF MASTER'S  
SCHOLARS ON MATERIAL CULTURE

---

**Author(s):** Laura Ochoa Rincon

**Published by:** The Coalition of Master's Scholars on Material Culture

**URL:** <https://cmsmc.org/publications/take-me-back>

**Date Published:** October 29, 2021

**Citation:** Ochoa Rincon, Laura. "Take Me Back to the Good Old Days': Racism, Berlin Wool Work, and Comfort." The Coalition of Master's Scholars on Material Culture, October 29, 2021.

---

CMSMC is run by fellow master's scholars as a platform for colleagues to disseminate their work. We are an independently run organization and are not affiliated with any university or institution. This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

For more information about The Coalition of Master's Scholars on Material Culture, please email us at [admin@cmsmc.org](mailto:admin@cmsmc.org)

# “Take me Back to the Good Old Days”: Racism, Berlin Wool Work, and Comfort

By: Laura Ochoa Rincon

**Abstract:** Whether they be hung, worn, or used in a multitude of ways, textiles are a tangible component of material culture. They can tell us anything from political culture to stories of nostalgia. This 1876 Berlin wool table cover found in the collection of Winterthur Museum (2020.004) is a curious example of how embroidery and nostalgia intersect. This piece of textile, while overtly racist in its presentations, actually helps us consider the idea of racism in textiles as a teaching object. Even though the imagery of this piece is highly racialized and offensive, it was also evidently loved and cared for by its owners—enough so that the owner, or owners, came back multiple times to make alterations and preserve the piece. This paper discusses not only the tangible aspects of the table cover such as the stitches and design influences, but also the intangible such as what the designs in the cloth tell an audience. Given that many of the designs on this tablecloth were taken from children’s stories, the piece argues that this was intentional in order to “other” Black bodies and garner a certain type of racism—nostalgic racism. This racism is presented in this object via the space of the parlor. The parlor was no longer just a place to be with family and on special occasions, but quickly became one of the most radical forms of conspicuous consumption of the nineteenth century. It was a space to make a statement about how your family perceives the world and vice versa. While this piece might stoke immediate negative feelings, it is critical to remember that those were not the feelings experienced by the owner of this piece and their family. They saw these racist images as amusing and a cultivator for conversation and community.

**Keywords:** *craft, nostalgia, Berlin woolwork, racism, society, textiles*

Used in a multitude of ways, for both public and private use, textiles are a tangible component of material culture that can tell us anything, from political culture to stories of nostalgia of bygone days. This 1876 Berlin wool table cover (Figure 1) showing what seems to be a mosaic full of jovial and racist imagery in a wide plethora of different yarn colors is a curious example of how embroidery and nostalgia intersect. This paper will address the implications of having such strong racial imagery in an object designed to be presented in a parlor or similar location. Throughout we will discuss the intersection of nostalgia and racist iconographies in this piece and try to discern what we can learn from the implication of what we observe. We will find that the method of Berlin wool work is used in this piece to specifically arouse a sense of nostalgia in connection to racial attitudes of the time and the usage of it as a table cover shows the *laissez faire* attitude the owners might have possessed with these images.

However, before delving into the piece's narrative, implications, and place in the home, it is important to step back and start with the basics. The table cover measures 35 inches in length and 22 inches in height. It features images of pastoral life, games, cartoon characters, and graphic depictions of Black Americans. A cross-stitched date at the bottom center in the middle dates the piece to 1876. It also features what seem to be initials on the top middle of the piece that reads "M.E.D." The table cover was donated to the Winterthur Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware, by a woman coming from Moraga, California. Other than the donor's name and address, and the fact that this was donated to the museum in 2020, there is no further information on its provenance. According to EmU, the search engine for finding information about objects in the Winterthur collection, this object is listed as "African American needlework, c. 1876." I will explain later in this paper why this description is not fitting for the textile and why the institution itself might benefit from changing the description.



*Figure 1: Full image of 1876 piece of Berlin wool work. Image taken by Author, courtesy of Winterthur Museum.*

The beige background fabric is composed of flax. The piece features a perimeter of satin-stitched soft-spun four-ply zephyr wool in various shades of pink and green. The satin stitch is tied off at the end of the piece and double knotted to create a marvelous ombre fringe effect. The beauty of the fringe itself almost acts as a frame to centralize the piece's racist imagery. The majority of the piece is cross-stitched with the exception of satin stitching on the perimeter, but we also see cross-stitches in smaller elements of the piece seen below in the images (Figures 2, 3) of a winged insect and the bristles of a broom.



Figure 3: Image of Satin stitched light blue broom. Photo by author, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.



Figure 2: Picture of Satin stitched winged bug in orange and black. Photo by author, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

Satin stitching was used to create the brooms and a small, winged creature. The maker also shows off their herringbone stitch in one element, pictured below (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Image of single line of a herringbone stitch in beige. Photo taken by author, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

The wool in this piece is dyed with aniline dyes. First synthesized in 1856 using coal tar, Aniline dyes enabled textile manufacturers to produce many vividly colored yarns. Aniline dyes vastly increased the range of vivid colors available to consumers, replacing the more muted tones produced by naturally

derived dyes. The use of these new colors caused “Berlin wool [to be] famous for its clear, bright shades, pure whites, and delicate pastels. The vibrancy of color for which Berlin work was so loved was imparted to the yarn by synthetic aniline dyes, which had largely replaced the natural dyes used previously.”<sup>i</sup>

The greatly expanded color palette available to makers enabled increased experimentation with the use of color in Berlin work. Nevertheless, most contemporaries of the time were quick to call out the art form for its excessive and ‘unnecessary’ use of vibrant colors, which were “indiscriminately mixed and produced discordant effects.”<sup>ii</sup> This sentiment of the handicraft would most likely have been known by the maker, but nevertheless they persisted in using this technique in order to adorn their table cover.

Heavy alteration work is seen throughout the piece using needle weaving. As shown below in Figure 5, there is darning on nineteen separate locations of the piece. The darning is done with two-ply crewel wool to replicate the linen serving as the background fabric. The stitcher used a plain weave structure in their darning to match with the background fabric, achieving the desired effect.



Figure 5: Image of full Berlin woolwork table cover with annotations made of alterations shown in white circles. Photo taken by author, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

Turning the piece over reveals more about its composition and its significance to the former owners. The left-hand verso side shows instances of alteration. The stitching on these alterations looks like satin stitches, and water damage is evidenced by the circular blue stains, as shown below (Figure 6). These repairs were completed by taking large satin stitches and running them through the back, then needle weaving on the front. Looking at the right-hand side of this piece turned over, we see fifteen instances of alterations. These fifteen alterations tell us more about the story of this piece. Even though, as we will discuss later on, this piece's imagery is highly racialized and offensive, it was also evidently loved and cared for by its owners—enough so that the owner, or owners, came back multiple times to make alterations and preserve the piece. Which begs the question: why go through all that trouble for a craft that was seen to some as vernacular? The largest alteration measures four inches and the smallest is less than a centimeter in length. The piece's backing is connected to the perimeter through whip stitches close to the fringe. There is evidence of quilting around the triangular points of where the green and pink ombre satin stitch begins in the front. There are no tension points on any of the four corners, leading me to conclude that this piece was not hung but displayed on a flat surface—most likely a table.



*Figure 6: Image of full back of table cover with alterations circled in white. Photo by author, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.*

The imagery on the front of the table cover is presented in three major sections: the left, right, and center of the table cover. On the left are images commonly found in pattern books of this period, such as butterflies, musical instruments, brooms, and schoolhouses. These images are also commonly found in Berlin wool samplers of the period. This soft imagery is aimed at stoking feelings of comfort in the home.<sup>iii</sup> And, in a sense, that is precisely the feeling this piece evokes, albeit a skewed and racially charged version of comfort. This is evidenced by three specific images located on the left side of the piece: two people kneeling before a central image that looks like a cup or chalice, the witch figure situated directly above, and the two Black figures holding hands with the text “we’s free” directly below. Looking below at figure 7, we can gauge how these three embroideries change the piece’s essence. What initially seems to be an image of everyday 19<sup>th</sup>-century life, featuring games such as hoop and stick, naturalistic imagery, and even bottles, is transformed into a piece with a specific political connotation.



*Figure 7: Image of left side of table cover. Photo taken by author, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.*



## The Imagery of the Witch

Witches were a common character used in children's illustrations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though the image of the witch proliferated in children's media, its utility and moral value were questioned. In *The Importance of Time* (1840), a popular book at the time that delves into the topics of childhood and parenting, the author writes that "the time children spend in hearing, or in reading such silly stories, is not only thrown away but misspent. It is thrown away because no good is to be gotten from such silly stories; it is misspent because it increases a love of folly and falsehood and lessens the desire for wisdom and truth."<sup>iv</sup> Given that there was pushback on such images, we can place this piece in the home differently. In a sense, the maker was pushing back against these ideas by showing the witch figure alongside other common nostalgic images while at the same time upholding the perception of witches by relating them to Black bodies by making the figure Black.

On the other hand, we need to make sense of the intentionality in the color of the witch. The witch is shown in a bright pink dress, a witch's hat, a broom, and Black skin with red eyes. Given the connection that witchcraft, and witches, held among early Americans, it is difficult not to point out a possible statement the maker was creating by choosing to stitch this character in Black skin. The imagery also refocuses the nostalgic nature of the piece. The craftsmanship inherent in this piece renders it an excellent example of Berlin wool work, while the imagery places it in an important political and social context. The table cover encompasses a larger narrative about the juxtaposition of these images and their place within a room such as a parlor.

“We’s Free”

Directly above the image of the witch is the phrase “we’s free,” with two figures holding hands. While the complete image is not a direct call out to minstrelsy, the individual figures are unmistakable as minstrel characters. This particular motif was popularized just after the end of the civil war in 1865. It can be seen in other collections, such as the one in the Chicago Historical Society, and was commonly also paired with the phrase “any holder but a slaveholder.”<sup>v</sup>



*Chicago Historical Society*

*Figure 8: Image of two stitched potholders saying, “Any Holder but a Slave Holder. Photo Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society.*

This particular image basis has its origins in fundraising efforts during the civil war and was often used to express anti-slavery views in a ‘humorous’ manner. I postulate that the maker was not honoring the Civil War's end, and the Confederacy's loss, but mocking the image itself. Other weavers have used this imagery mockingly, but with little known about the creator of this piece, it is difficult to determine if they had any such intention of social comment or were simply

using patterns available to them. However, the availability of these patterns at the time speaks to several different cultural phenomena. With context, the image of the two figures is transformed entirely. This argument is bolstered by looking at the image of the two kneeling figures in redface. This image serves to create another kind of other, without specificity in the particular group it represents. In essence, there has to be an antithesis to the white characters depicted in the piece. It acts out like a child's storybook: there are the white protagonists, depicted in culturally acceptable clothes and partaking in recognizable activities, and the Black and Brown antagonists depicted cruelly and given magical elements to villainize them further.<sup>vi</sup> The combination of these elements draws the viewer in and sets a clear tone.

Now, looking at the right-hand side of the piece, we can begin to discuss decoupage and its influence on this piece. As mentioned previously, the piece, in its entirety, feels bulky and busy. In a sense, it resembles sampler pieces of its time. However, what I believe we are observing are the influences of decoupage. Initially popularized in eighteenth-century England, this form of craft is a technique of "taking sheets of engravings which were hand-colored, and cutting and pasting them onto the surface of furniture."<sup>vii</sup> While this piece can never be defined as decoupage because of the materials, it does not mean that we cannot note similar influences in the table cover. Decoupage Artists Worldwide (D.A.W.) explain that the technique itself was used as a way to "beautify objects."<sup>viii</sup> While similar to the concept of samplers given its busy nature, I would argue that the table cover is related to decoupage because the intention was not to show off the skill of a practicing embroiderer, but to produce a collage of imagery meant to evoke charm and nostalgia. We can draw similar connections with other objects in the Winterthur collection by observing a center table, (Figures 9 and 10) dated between 1830 and 1850, that heavily features decoupage. As the EmU record explains, this table features "engraved

and etched portraits of political figures, women and children, depictions of biblical events, landscapes, seascapes, architectural monuments, and angels.” This table takes unrelated imagery from visual culture and combines it to create a unified decorative program and shares a formal link to decoupage due to its mixture of mediums used to form one cohesive idea. The table cover discussed in this paper performs the same function but creates a decorative program—a message conveyed through the use of decorative arts—centered around race and nostalgia.



*Figure 9: Table, 1830-1850, front view. Courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.*

*Figure 10: Table, 1830-1850, base view, including legs. Courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.*



Four images on the right side of the piece (Figure 11) are important when considering decoupage's influences: The Punch and Judy puppets, the scissors, the two monkeys chasing each other, and the imagery of a white character on horseback.



Figure 11: Right side view of table cover. Photo by author, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum

With its origins in 1622 English lore, Punch and Judy puppets have long been a staple of early British and American childhood. Even in the nineteenth century, the characters were controversial because some argue that the behavior of these characters glorifies and romanticizes domestic violence.<sup>ix</sup> Given this information, we can note which side of the aisle the maker of this table cover fell on. The behavior of these characters glorifies and romanticizes domestic violence and that was a deliberate move on the maker to include it.<sup>x</sup>

Given this information, we can note which side of the aisle the maker of this table cover fell on. Its use here is not meant to make a statement about the violent nature of the puppets but to emphasize it and connect it with other similar childhood imagery. On the bottom left hand of the puppet stage, we can note the pair of maroon-colored scissors. The scissors and their association with children's stories can be connected to the puppet stage as another example of the influence childhood stories had on this piece. William Feaver's *When We Were Young: Two Centuries of Children's Book Illustrations*, depicts a German cartoon entitled *Der Struwwelpeter*, which roughly translates into Shaggy Peter.<sup>xi</sup> The story, popularly used by adults to children,

warns children about the dangers of misbehaving and features the Tailor's character, whose scissor-hands allow him to punish misbehaving children. Feaver shows that this story was familiar throughout nineteenth-century America, and, subsequently, the scissor imagery connects the piece to *Der Struwwelpeter*.<sup>xii</sup>

Reorienting back to the Punch and Judy imagery, we can observe two primate figures with bright, red eyes who seem to be chasing each other. The history of using primate imagery to exemplify Black bodies traces back hundreds of years. Charles Mills explains that, historically, monkeys in Christian and Muslim culture have often been associated with demons and evil. Mills argues that this essentially gave monkeys a magical and spiritual element closely tied to witchcraft and the occult.<sup>xiii</sup> Given the historically religious roots of this country, whoever is depicted in connection with evil iconography is therefore considered evil themselves. This predetermined narrative was then applied to Black bodies and furthered throughout history in printed media and handicrafts. During the Age of Enlightenment, which lasted from the early seventeenth century until the nineteenth century, ideas of eugenics were prevalent, and scientists would attempt to assert the falsity that Black bodies were closer to apes than humans. European publications popularized this highly racist depiction of Black bodies, which subsequently spread and became popular in America as well.<sup>xiv</sup> Children's literature, like that of popular print media, also used visual imagery to express ideologies. This in the early nineteenth century depictions instilled the association of racism as subtle and 'humorous' within popular culture, therefore perpetuating its role. Scholars of children's literature have stated that the use of anthropomorphism as a literary tool makes children susceptible to conformist and often regressive ideologies.<sup>xv</sup> Visual items such as this table cover were often the first exposure kids have to popular culture, given the connection that children had to the family parlor space. If that

visual item portrays Black bodies as being more primate than human, then the audience of said piece is experiencing a narrative that has been curated by eugenics and racism.<sup>xvi</sup>



*Figure 12: Middle view of table cover. Image taken by author, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.*

The male character riding on horseback in the upper right-hand corner of the piece represents an important juxtaposition between the calm, cross-stitched upper half and the image is cross-stitched and is more calming than the chaos of imagery occurring below. It features an ombre aniline-dyed tree and grass. The figure is facing west and is wearing blue pants and a hat.<sup>xvii</sup> The character is surrounded by nature and soft images such as hearts, butterflies, and playing cards. These qualities and images clash with the figures below the man on horseback. Whereas those depicted malice, punishment, and nostalgia, this image is one you would find in other Berlin work from the time.<sup>xviii</sup>

Now that we have looked at the general narratives of the left and right sides, it is time to focus on the centerpiece of this table cover, a minstrel image that centralizes the piece's themes. The original inspiration can be found in the 1866 book *Madame Goubaud's Album of Needlework*, a design source containing patterns and designs for needlework projects, as well as motifs that could be used creatively by makers. Design sources such as this one were popular and prevalently used by those partaking in the craft. The centerpiece features two cross-stitched minstrel figures sitting across from each other playing music. One plays the clarinet and the other the violin, while a Black central figure with red eyes watches over them. The book suggests the use of green and black but also suggests black and maroon as an alternative. The use of the black and maroon colorway of this design by the maker of the table cover suggests a familiarity with this source. In the book, this design is called "Christy Minstrels' Slipper" in reference to Edwin Pearce Christy, one of the most influential minstrel creators of the nineteenth century. Edwin spent much of the nineteenth century traveling throughout the United States, performing his minstrel show, which included live music and "comedy." This group was so popular that they dominated much of the minstrel scene in the first half of the nineteenth century.

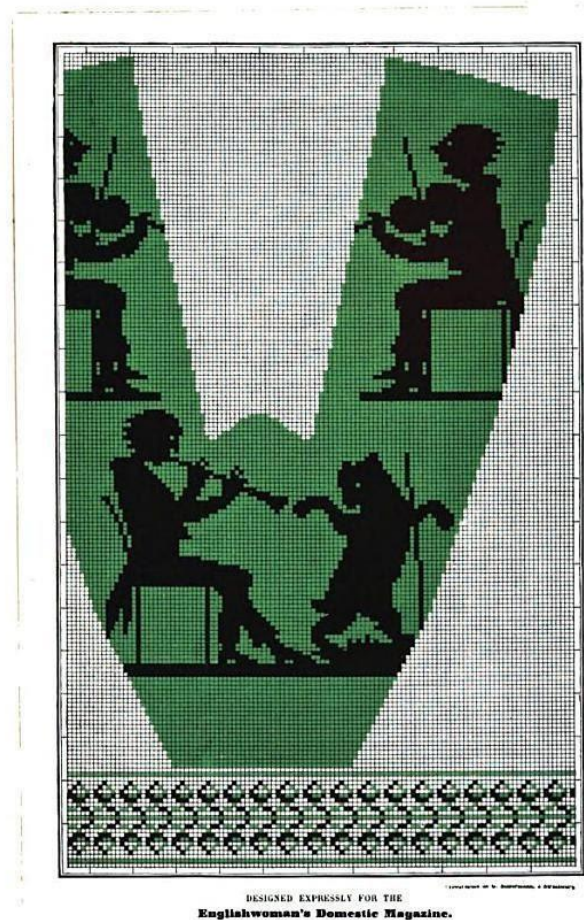


Figure 13: Minstrel slipper pattern featuring a man playing an instrument and a bear dancing. \_Goubaud, Adolphe. *Madame Goubaud's Album of Needlework*. Office of the "Englishwoman's domestic magazine", 1866.



By using this imagery as the central one, the focal point of the piece, the maker commodifies the dispossession of Black bodies. Minstrelsy grew out of northern white working-class people and their infatuation with the caricatured Black population. In a sense the White population both feared and were intrigued by their Black counterparts which only furthered the obsession. This infatuation with the characterization resulted in the use of Blackface and minstrelsy as a sort of “distorted mirror” in which white middle- and working-class people could voice their concerns and assert their values by hyperbolizing the “other.”<sup>xix</sup> In the middle of this minstrel show is a white child holding a flower. The image of this child is significant because the maker put the figure right in the center of the minstrel show. The child’s innocence is presented as a direct foil to the perceived inherent “danger” Black bodies posed when in proximity to white ones. While there is no way of confirming the maker's intentions, we can infer that the decision to pose the child here was intentional, even though we might never know why.

Given the piece’s expressive nature and lack of tension points on the corners, this piece was most likely used as a table cover. The utility of this object brings into question what having this piece in a space like a parlor does. Given the object's size, it most likely would have sat in a parlor on top of a gaming or side table. Even though there was significant contemporary opposition to the idea of the parlor due to its “stuffy” and “crowded” nature by the elite in society, the form persisted and flourished within the middle-class home as they wanted to use the space as a performance for their new wealth. This was not simply a space to engage in activities but also “became an activity [itself] that denoted membership in, or aspirations to belong to, the respectable middle class.”<sup>xx</sup> As the desire for success permeated to lower classes, the hunger for obtaining the objects others had also increased. This desire caused spaces such as parlors to be filled with objects meant to symbolize status while often having no useful purpose. As the parlor

itself might have been crowded with sculptures, imagery, and objects of status, so too can we see that same density in the table cover. Similar to decoupage, the creation of the middle-class parlor came from a desire for design, conspicuous consumption, and identity. One can then imagine the space around the table cover.

Due to its popularity within the middle class, Berlin wool work was frequently seen as a lower form of needlework, ranking below other forms of embroidery.<sup>xxi</sup> “Showing neither sense of aestheticism nor design, the very type of work, which still, today, denigrates the status of embroidery.”<sup>xxii</sup> Though many criticized it, Berlin work altered how women contributed in domestic and public spaces and as a more utilitarian form of handiwork, it expanded who was able to create these pieces and allowed for more creative uses of different images, even though it was criticized as gaudy.<sup>xxiii</sup> It is also important to note that Berlin work exceeded the confines of the parlor. As shown below, this 1856 cushion cover found at Winterthur Museum gives us a



glimpse into the versatility of the craft (figure 14). Given that these pieces were supposed to embellish the home and, subsequently, home life, they contain a certain sense of comfort with soft images such as flowers and wreaths. Even if found outside the parlor, Berlin wool pieces exemplify cultural and spiritual beliefs at the time.

*Figure 14: Cushion cover  
2003.0050, Courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.*

2003.0050 Cushion cover

Enlarge

Armed with this information, it is likely that this item would have belonged to a middle-class home and, it can be inferred, one with a parlor. Grier writes that during this period, the concept of the parlor had transformed and centralized on the performance of self and family. The parlor was no longer just a place to be with family or gather on special occasions but quickly became one of the most radical forms of conspicuous consumption of the nineteenth century. It was a space to make a statement about how your family perceives the world and vice versa. As can be observed below with this 1879 parlor room example taken from Grier's book, a round-top table serves as the center of the entire room. While not excessively lavish, one can still note the intentionality of the space. Everything from the number of chairs to the paintings on the wall is curated for the space to exhibit comfort, gentility, and wealth. Textiles are evident throughout the parlor space and it strokes a conversation about the centered table and its variance in the space. Given that a table cover is very mobile, we are introduced to the idea of who the audience for the table cover was. The cover adds its distinct identity into the room while also retaining the ability to be hidden away at a moment's notice. Perhaps the family this belonged to wanted certain people to see it and not others, but it is also possible that the table's utility changed, and the cover was put away once the family was done using the table. This claim is bolstered by referring back to the damage on the front side of the table cover. There are very evident and long tears on the middle, left, and right sides of the piece. This type of crease damage is only found in objects that were commonly folded and put away. This evidence transforms the object's meaning into one signifying non-permanence and furthering the curation of the self in parlors. It also speaks to the desire that might have created this piece: to stroke a conversation. Oftentimes objects placed in a parlor were meant to invoke discussion and seeing a piece such as this one might have had that effect on guests.

*Fig. 1. "Parlor of Mr. F. P. Appleton Residence," stereograph by S. Stowe, Lowell, Massachusetts, about 1879. Courtesy Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.*



*Figure 15: Picture of 1879 Parlor, black and white featuring four people in the space. Grier, Katherine. Culture and Comfort Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930. Washington (D.C.), DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.*

While there is not a table cover shown in the image above (figure 15), the room does seem to feature various types of embroideries and textiles. Much like some of the imagery found in the piece, this picture shows us naturalistic and calming embroidered motifs. It brings about the question of how, or even if, the room changes when introduced to racist motifs such as the ones present in the table cover. Parlors were a space for the show of wealth and culture, and thus inherently classist and exclusionary of BIPOC. Given this truth, the table cover would have functioned the same whether it was one filled with flowers or one like the piece described today. This is further bolstered by the previous discussion on nostalgia.



Figure 16: Berlin wool work table cover featuring nine vignettes of daily life in beige tones. 1965.2378, courtesy of the Winterthur Museum

For context, let us look at another example of a table cover from around the same period. This table cover (figure 16), found at Winterthur Museum, was made between 1830 and 1870 in Germany. While it may look outwardly different, with “a central grid with nine squares displaying figures in the costumes of Commedia

dell' Arte characters,” it still effectively functions as a centralized image to portray gentility and status within the home.<sup>xxiv</sup> The differences between the objects are further seen when looking at their naturalistic elements. On this table cover, the images are more realistic and detailed than the almost rudimentary nature of the racist wool work table cover. While there is no denying the differences in style and technique, there is also no denying that this piece would fit into a parlor in the same way that the table cover would have, which is to say that it met the desires and necessities of the family it belonged to and presented their social identity.<sup>xxv</sup>

The table cover we examined throughout this paper was effective for what it was: a nostalgic look at childhood with interwoven narratives of racism and exclusion. Given that, there is no argument to be made for the creation of dissonance within the space. There was no dissonance because this piece does precisely what Grier writes a parlor during the nineteenth

century should do: display a public identity in a room meant for a private gathering. Whether this identity is outwardly racist or not does not change the exclusionary nature of the space. I argue that the racist imagery found in this piece was used as a tool to bolster the maker's childhood nostalgia, not the other way around. I also argue that it served its purpose well, based on clues such as alterations and tearing. While this piece might strike immediate negative feelings, it is critical to remember that those were not the feelings experienced by the owner of this piece and their family. They saw these racist images as amusing and a cultivator for conversation and community.

But it is also urgent to step back from our contemporary view of things. This table cover would not have been seen as vile by those possessing it. It might have served as a jumpstart to a conversation or as a cautionary tale told to the children of the house. Given the popularity of this racist imagery in popular culture at the time, it was not often immediately associated as racist like it is today. In addition, the way we perceive this piece has everything to do with its location. We might interpret it differently if we take it out of the parlor and move it into a museum space, in which we can further explore the symbolism of the various imagery. By looking at the piece once more (figure 1), we can observe the influences of decoupage to create a centralized program surrounding race and childhood while at the same time recognizing the shift in perception based on who is interacting with the piece itself. The creases and other visual evidence show us that this piece was obviously loved and cared for and the question arises of how this cultural moment was seen by those living through it. So, what does this mean for how we study historical textiles? While it is no doubt crucial to look at the technicality of the piece, that's not what should take the forefront. Instead, we ought to look at pieces like this to gauge a better understanding of how racism seeps its way so easily into homes. Something as innocent

looking as this cover table actually reveals sentiments that have existed for hundreds of years. Without analyzing these sentiments, we cannot fully understand the positionality of this table cover inside a parlor space. Without analyzing these sentiments, we would not be able to fully understand the ability, power, and capacity of this table cover to perpetuate strong cultural memory, especially inside the often intimate and extremely personal parlor space.

## Bibliography

- Belolan, Nicole. "'The Blood of Murdered Time' Berlin Wool Work in America, 1840-1865." *Winterthur Portfolio* 45, no. 4 (2011): 321–52. <https://doi.org/10.1086/663734>.
- Beeton, Isabella. *Beeton's Housewife's Treasury of Domestic Information: Comprising Complete and Practical Instructions on the House and Its Furniture, Artistic Decoration Economy, Toilet, Children, Etiquette, Domestic and Fancy Needlework, Dressmaking and Millinery, and All Other Household Matters. With Every Requisite Direction to Secure the Comfort, Elegance, and Prosperity of the Home: a Companion Volume to "Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management"; Profusely Illustrated*. London, UK: Ward, Lock, 1870.
- Brackman, Barbara. Civil War Quilts, January 1, 1970. <https://civilwarquilts.blogspot.com/2017/06/>.
- Cluckie, Linda. "The Rise and Fall of Art Needlework: Its Socio-Economic and Cultural Aspects." *TEXTILE* 9, no. 2 (2011): 260–62. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175183511x13055600095789>.
- DESNOYERS, ROSIKA. *PICTORIAL EMBROIDERY IN ENGLAND: a Critical History of Needlepainting and Berlin Work*. S.l.: AVA ACADEMIA, 2021.
- Feaver, William. *When We Were Young: Two Centuries of Children's Book Illustration*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.
- Grier, Katherine C. "The Comfortable Theatre ." *Culture & Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850-1930*, 20–79. Editors?Rochester, NY: Strong Museum, 1988.
- Hewes, Lauren B., Justin G. Schiller, Laura Wasowicz, and Kayla Haveles Hopper. *Radiant with Color & Art: McLoughlin Brothers and the Business of Picture Books, 1858-1920: December 6, 2017-February 3, 2018, The Grolier Club, New York*. Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2017.
- Harbeson, Georgiana Brown. *American Needlework*. New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1938.
- "History of Decoupage." Decoupage Artists Worldwide, 2018. <https://www.decoupage.org/home/history-of-decoupage>.
- "Illustrated Children's Books: Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886)." State Library Victoria, 2017. <https://blogs.slv.vic.gov.au/our-stories/illustrated-childrens-books-randolph-caldecott-1846-1886/>.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- marvingardensusa, Author. "The History of Decoupage." *MarvinGardensUSA (blog)*, April 28, 2010. <http://marvingardensusa.com/blog/2010/04/28/the-history-of-decoupage/>.
- Phelan, Dorothy. *The Point of the Needle: Five Centuries of Samplers and Embroideries*. Dorset, MA: Dovecote Press, 2001.



Pisano, Pietro, Wulf Hund, Charles Mills, and Silvia Sebastiani. "Simianization: Apes, Gender, Class, and Race." *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 44, no. 2. (2017): 370–90. <https://doi.org/10.15446/achsc.v44n2.64029>.

Proctor, Molly G. Essay. In *Victorian Canvas Work: Berlin Wool Work*, 14. London, UK: Batsford, 1986.

Serena, Raffaella. *Berlin Work: Samplers & Embroidery of the Nineteenth Century*. South Kearny, NJ: D.M.C. Corporation, 1996.

Stepanova, Irina. "Berlin Wool: Fine Fiber from an Innovative Age." *PieceWork*. August 3, 2020. <https://pieceworkmagazine.com/berlin-wool-fine-fiber-from-an-innovative-age/>.

Timmerman, Nora. "Too Many Monkeys Jumping in Their Heads: Animal Lessons within Young Children's Media." *Animality and Environmental Education* 16 (2011).

"'That's the Way to Do It!' A History of Punch & Judy." Victoria and Albert Museum, 2016. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/thats-the-way-to-do-it-a-history-of-punch-and-judy>.

## Endnotes

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Irina Stepanova, "Berlin Wool: Fine Fiber from an Innovative Age," *PieceWork* (PieceWork, August 3, 2020), <https://pieceworkmagazine.com/berlin-wool-fine-fiber-from-an-innovative-age/>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Molly G. Proctor, "Victorian Canvas Work: Berlin Wool Work," in *Victorian Canvas Work: Berlin Wool Work*. London, UK: Batsford, 1986, p. 14.
- <sup>iii</sup> Similar examples can be found in various sources such as a Pattern Book from Briggs & Co. dated 1870-1880, additionally, see: Dorothy Phelan, *The Point of the Needle: Five Centuries of Samplers and Embroideries* (Dorset, MA: Dovecote Press, 2001), 54-58.
- <sup>iv</sup> By the authoress of "*Aids to Development*" and other writers, *The Importance of Time* (Bristol: Wright and Albright, 1840): 2.
- <sup>v</sup> Barbara Brackman, "Civil War Quilts," *Civil War Quilts* (blog), January 1, 1970, <https://civilwarquilts.blogspot.com/2017/06/>.
- <sup>vi</sup> The red faced characters are seen kneeling below a cup, perhaps giving a tribute or praying, which also goes back to the point made on the addition of magical elements to this piece that serve to heighten the threat level these characters possess.
- <sup>vii</sup> "The History of Decoupage," *MarvinGardensUSA* (blog), April 28, 2010, <http://marvingardensusa.com/blog/2010/04/28/the-history-of-decoupage/>.
- <sup>viii</sup> "History of Decoupage," Decoupage Artists Worldwide, 2018, <https://www.decoupage.org/home/history-of-decoupage>.
- <sup>ix</sup> "'That's the Way to Do It!' A History of Punch & Judy," Victoria and Albert Museum, 2016, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/thats-the-way-to-do-it-a-history-of-punch-and-judy>.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xi</sup> William Feaver, *When We Were Young: Two Centuries of Children's Book Illustration*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977., 68-70.
- <sup>xii</sup> After research I also discovered that there are a few 19<sup>th</sup> century samplers which feature Punch and Judy on Ebay, but I could not find more information (not enough to put on body of text) but it is worth noting that young women who were learning to embroider would use this imagery, also in cross stitches, to show off their work
- <sup>xiii</sup> Pietro Pisano et al., "Simianization: Apes, Gender, Class, and Race.," *Anuario Colombiano De Historia Social y De La Cultura* 44, no. 2 (January 2017): pp. 370-390, <https://doi.org/10.15446/achsc.v44n2.64029>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-am-i-a-man-and-a-brother-a-begging-apes-placard-reads-in-this-cartoon-94774263.html>
- <sup>xv</sup> Nora Timmerman, "Too Many Monkeys Jumping in Their Heads: Animal Lessons within Young Children's Media," *Animality and Environmental Education* 16, 2011.
- <sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/letters/2012/apes.htm> is another example
- <sup>xvii</sup> While this could symbolize the recently slowed down Gold Rush, I don't think we can definitively say so. It is, though, an interesting point to consider. This could symbolize western expansion and manifest destiny.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Georgiana Brown Harbeson, *American Needlework* (New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1938). p. 74.
- <sup>xix</sup> Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- <sup>xx</sup> Katherine C. Grier, "The Comfortable Theatre ," in *Culture & Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850-1930*. Rochester, NY: Strong Museum, 1988. pp. 20-79.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Georgiana Brown Harbeson, *American Needlework*. New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1938. pp. 73.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Cluckie, Linda, *The Rise and Fall of Art Needlework: Its Socio-Economic and Cultural Aspects*, 61.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Nicole Belolan, "'The Blood of Murdered Time'" Berlin Wool Work in America, 1840-1865," *Winterthur Portfolio* 45, no. 4 (2011): pp. 321-352, <https://doi.org/10.1086/663734>.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Emu Record, 1965.2378, Winterthur Museum
- <sup>xxv</sup> Katherine C. Grier, "The Comfortable Theatre ," in *Culture & Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850-1930* (Rochester, NY: Strong Museum, 1988), pp. 20-79.