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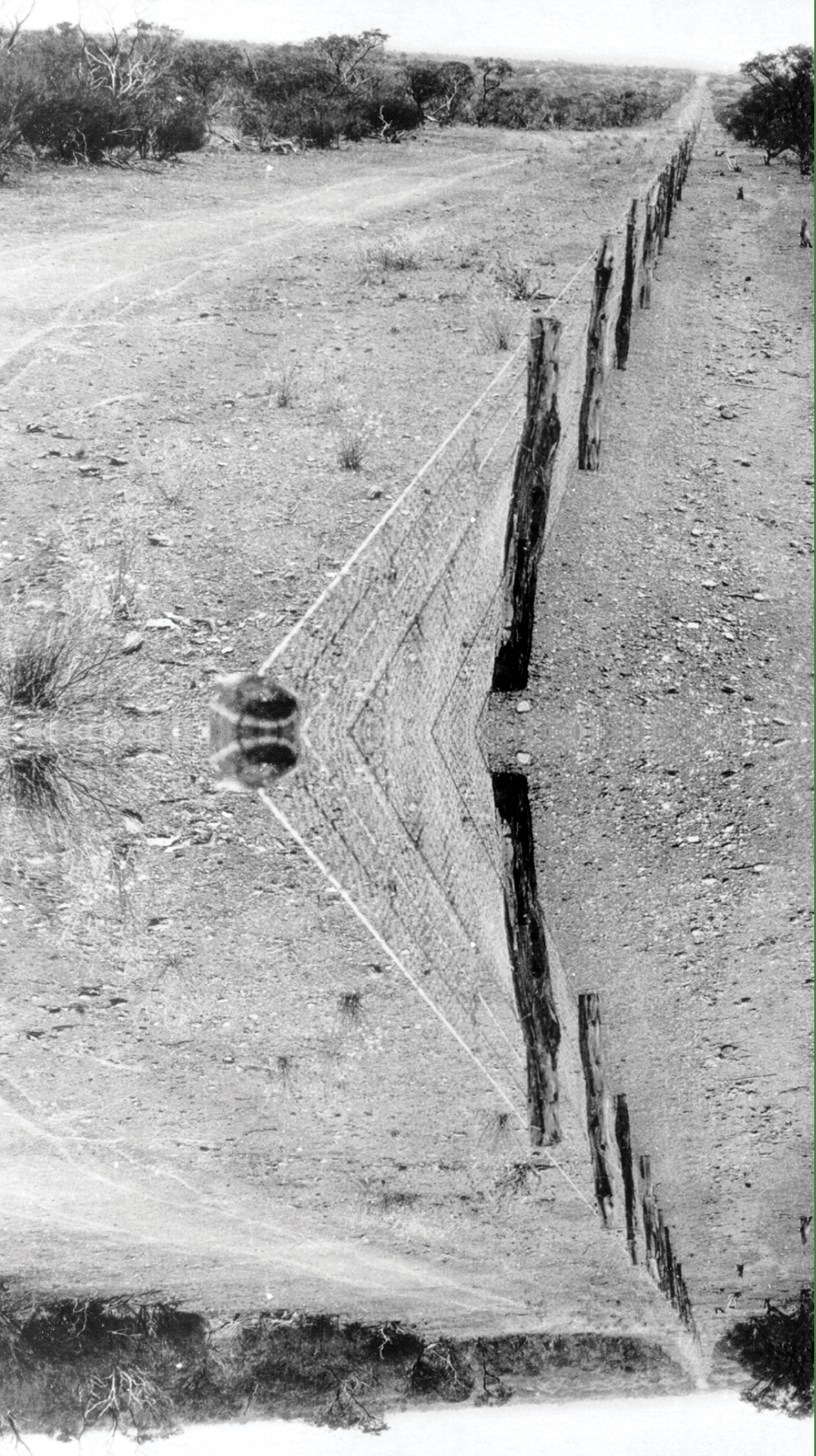
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# feature articles



## At Home in the Wild: Race, Power, and Domesticity in the Transatlantic Wallpapers of Zuber & Co.

Thomas Busciglio-Ritter

On July 24, 1833, French painter Jean-Julien Deltil (1791–1863) sent a letter to wallpaper manufacturer Jean Zuber (1773–1852) of Rixheim, Alsace.<sup>1</sup> The two men were working on a new project together: wallpaper featuring landscapes of the United States, with which Zuber intended to bolster his company's sales in the latter country (figs. 1 and 2). For this design, Deltil planned four scenes focused on New York, West Point, Boston and Niagara Falls.<sup>2</sup> The descriptions of the scenes, which were to be composed of physical landmarks, forms of transport, and various groups of people, betray Deltil's intention to use spaces and visual signifiers easily associable with the American continent from a European perspective, even if such designs implied taking liberties with geographic and scientific accuracy.<sup>3</sup> Despite Deltil's single written mention of Black

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Jacqué, "An Economic Approach to Scenic Wallpapers: A Study of the Archives of J. Zuber & Cie," in *French Scenic Wallpaper, 1795-1865*, ed. Odile Nouvel-Kammerer (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 76.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Jean-Julien Deltil, Fontainebleau, to Jean Zuber, Rixheim, July 24, 1833, Z 123, Correspondance, Archives Zuber, Musée du Papier peint, Rixheim, France. Translated from the French by the author. For a complete description of the scenes, see Thomas Busciglio-Ritter, "The Transatlantic American Landscape: Episodes in an Aesthetic and Material History (1810-1860)" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2022), 244.

<sup>3</sup> Such liberties include conflating unrelated geographic places, such as the Natural Bridge of Virginia and Niagara Falls, and using mostly fanciful vegetation as visual fillers.

figures, the actual designs also reveal the artist's determination to use Black figures as props in his compositions. Engaged in social interactions, these characters appear in all four scenes, sometimes alongside Indigenous figures.



Figure 1. Jean Zuber and Jean-Julien Deltil, *Views of North America: West Point and Boston Harbor*, 1834 [reprinted 1960s]. Woodblock-printed wallpaper, 12 ft 9 ½ in. x 49 ft 4 ⅛ in. Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France. Photograph by the author.

The present article argues that these figures can be seen as an illustration of internalized ideas about race on both sides of the Euro-American Atlantic, which influenced the imagery of visual products like wallpaper. In this case, the design reflected a social and visual history of white identity constructed through allusions to an order of human races within nature. Moreover, the affordability and portability of Zuber's landscape wallpapers allowed them to circulate throughout the Northern Atlantic and be installed in domestic spaces in places as diverse as Ohio, Louisiana, and Georgia. There, the display of a Zuber wallpaper helped buyers support their own



Figure 2. Jean Zuber and Jean-Julien Deltil, *Views of North America: Natural Bridge and Niagara*, 1834 [reprinted 1960s], woodblock-printed wallpaper, 12 ft 9 ½ in. x 49 ft 4 ⅛ in. Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France. Photograph by the author.

pretense at racial, economic, and social privilege, as well as project visual discourses about American scenery that perpetuated beliefs in racial hierarchies and an untamed exploitation of natural resources. Behind an apparent depiction of harmony and prosperity, the imagery of scenic wallpapers like Zuber's supported a transatlantic construction of a white American landscape.<sup>4</sup>

The racialized landscape of Zuber's wallpapers transpired in two instances, examined here. First, the visual sources used by Zuber and the artists he employed to create designs like the *Views of North America* contributed to a history of racially charged representation. This was especially manifest in the inclusion of African American figures dressed "in fine clothes" (to quote Deltil). Second, and more significantly, the spaces of production of the wallpapers in France and the U.S.A, and the circulation and display of Zuber's wallpapers in regions like the U.S. South,

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase "panoramic wallpaper" (or "scenic wallpaper") is used to describe a type of printed design that is continuous across several rolls of paper. This creates a complete picture that covers several walls without being constrained by space, with scenes to be read together or in succession. Most designs featured lavish, imaginary landscapes, sometimes inspired by mythological subjects. Panoramic wallpaper was introduced in France at the turn of the nineteenth century.

prompted this complex imagery to intersect with local beliefs and political ideologies, reinforcing discourses of racial domination and exploitation in regions connected to the wider Atlantic World through the economy of slavery.

In that sense, this article builds upon the social approach of historian Catherine Lynn, whose 1980 volume *Wallpaper in America* still constitutes the most complete examination of this medium in the nineteenth-century United States.<sup>5</sup> Yet while Lynn's approach offers a useful framework, one of her assertions regarding the geographical dispersion of Zuber's market before the Civil War has to be nuanced. Contrary to previous scholars, Lynn acknowledged the presence of scenic wallpapers in the antebellum West and South, regions formerly believed to have been less exposed to this French production.<sup>6</sup> Yet she interpreted the desire of customers from these regions for Zuber products as a mere cultural emulation of the eastern seaboard.<sup>7</sup> According to her, the circulation of scenic wallpaper in the hinterland allowed the tastes of U.S. Northeasterners to permeate these regions and standardize consumption practices.

Zuber's business approach in the United States, however, reveals a willingness to directly expand in the South and thus cater to different customer tastes. By the late 1790s, wallpapers produced in France were encountered in homes throughout New England.<sup>8</sup> Yet the first sale of a panoramic wallpaper design in the country only occurred in May 1816, in Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup> Sensing a rising interest in this type of product, which he had helped develop, Jean Zuber finally opened a sales depot in New York City in 1828, renting a warehouse at 65 Cedar Street in Manhattan. The location was strategic: situated in the southern part of the island, halfway between the commercial thoroughfare of Broadway and the East River docks, where imported merchandise poured into the city.<sup>10</sup> From there, the company secured orders for imported sets from

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<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Kelly, "Wallpaper and America," *The Wallpaper* 1, no. 2 (February 2020): 4.

<sup>6</sup> "Very few scenic papers found their way below the Mason and Dixon line. They stayed mostly in or near the Northern seaport towns where they landed. To the dwellings of the old New Englanders they brought a riot of colour that appeared almost licentious after the severity of whitewashed walls." Nancy McClelland, *Historic Wall-Papers: From Their Inception to the Introduction of Machinery* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1924), 158.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Lynn, *Wallpaper in America: From the Seventeenth Century to World War I* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Richard C. Nylander, Elizabeth Redmond, and Penny J. Sander, *Wallpaper in New England* (Boston: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1986), 123.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Jacqué and Philippe de Fabry, "Notes sur la commercialisation du papier peint français aux États-Unis dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle," *Bulletin de la Société industrielle de Mulhouse* 797 (July 1985): 108.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond-François Zuber, *Nouveaux cahiers Zuber n° 8: Le regard de deux manufacturiers mulhousiens sur les États-Unis: Ernest Zuber et Vincent Steinlen à l'Exposition de Philadelphie de 1876* (Rixheim, France: Association pour le souvenir Zuber, 2015), 6.



Figure 3. Jean Zuber and Jean-Julien Deltil, detail of *Views of North America*, 1834 [reprinted 1960s], woodblock-printed wallpaper, 12 ft 9 ½ in. x 49 ft 4 ⅛ in. Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France. Photograph by the author.

manufacturers of paper hangings.<sup>11</sup> In turn, resellers would offer Alsace-made wallpapers to customers in places as diverse as Cincinnati, Ohio, Norfolk, Virginia, and Mobile, Alabama.<sup>12</sup> This network ensured a wide dissemination of the sets, as was the case for the *Views of North America*, launched in 1834.<sup>13</sup> In the U.S. South and on its Western frontier, the *Views* became both intimate and performative in helping customers construct racial, economic, and social identities.

Numerous visual elements in Deltil's scenic designs, all approved by Zuber, proved ambiguous. In one scene, the elaborate greeting of a group of well-dressed Black figures, accompanied by a bow and the doffing of a top hat, is offset by the lack of decorum of a member of a nearby promenading group through her display of overt interest in the activities of the first group (fig. 3). While the image may suggest a space for the Black figures among the fashionably-dressed elite, Deltil's source for the scene presents another interpretation. Groups of Black figures were copied by the artist from *Life in Philadelphia*, a satirical portfolio of prints published by Edward Williams Clay (1799–1857) between 1828 and 1830, which was also distributed in Europe.<sup>14</sup> Some of Clay's sketches made their way to Britain and France after 1831.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Ernest Fiedler, New York, to Jean Zuber, Rixheim, May 29, 1828, Z 123, Correspondance, Archives Zuber, Musée du Papier peint, Rixheim, France.

<sup>12</sup> Z 87, Statistique de vente aux États-Unis, 1836-1844, Archives Zuber, Musée du Papier peint, Rixheim, France.

<sup>13</sup> *Views of North America* [Vues d'Amérique du Nord], was sold as seven panels, or thirty-two lengths of paper printed with engraved woodblocks. It measured 13 ft. (3.90 m) in height and 49 ft. (15.04 m) in length. The décor became a commercial success on both sides of the Atlantic. See Bernard Jacqué, "De la manufacture au mur, pour une histoire matérielle du papier peint (1770-1914)" (PhD diss., Université de Lyon II-Lumière, 2003), 501.

<sup>14</sup> Robert P. Emlen, "Imagining America in 1834: Zuber's Scenic Wallpaper 'Vues d'Amérique du Nord,'" *Winterthur Portfolio* 32, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1997): 196.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Reynolds Davison, "E. W. Clay: American Political Caricaturist of the Jacksonian Era" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1980), 53.

For this scene, Deltil merely reversed Clay's figures from *Shall I hab de honour ...* (1828), slightly altering some elements such as the man's hat (fig. 4). This original caricature, along with the entire *Life in Philadelphia* volume, mocked African American fashion, similar to many antebellum American prints published in cities like New York and Philadelphia. These images encouraged white middle-class consumption by satirizing poor and non-white audiences, their use of a racially-connoted dialect, and their lack of good taste in fashion. Though Deltil seems to have been oblivious to Clay's racist views towards free African Americans, his borrowings from printed sources, including ones published in France which were the primary material used by Deltil to sketch groups of Black figures in *Views of North America*, is useful in assessing how these characters were, from the onset, impacted by white transatlantic exchange and a Euro-American visual culture of race.



Figure 4. Edward Williams Clay, *Life in Philadelphia: Shall I hab de honour to dance de next quadrille wid you, Miss Minta?*, 1828, hand-colored etching, 8 x 7 ¼ in. Source: Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia.



Deltil's attitude may have been prompted by the economic realities of the industrial sector and spaces of production in which he was employed. Wallpaper production had deep connections to textile industries, especially in Mulhouse, the largest trade center near Zuber's facilities in Rixheim. Wallpaper manufacturers benefited from the networks and the technologies developed for textile production. In 1827, for instance, Zuber began printing wallpaper using copper cylinders, a tool originally used for cotton cloths.<sup>16</sup> Zuber's eldest son himself produced a report on the economy of cotton in 1831, highlighting the family's interest in the material and involvement with corresponding business circles.<sup>17</sup> Cotton industries, however, depended in good part on the Atlantic slave trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas.<sup>18</sup> Briefly abolished during the French Revolution, the *traites négrières* [slave trade] and slavery actually remained in place across France's colonial empire until 1815 and 1848 respectively.<sup>19</sup> In practice, the illegal trade of enslaved individuals was still widespread after this date and overseas slave labor was a vital support to industries in places like Mulhouse.<sup>20</sup> In that context, the city's entrepreneurs remained cautious about discussing issues of race, though their position was made increasingly difficult by international events, including the eventual outbreak of the U.S. Civil War. Local industrial newspapers attempted to downplay the importance of slavery in the conflict, going so far as to accuse the "North" of recklessly provoking the "South."<sup>21</sup> By restricting their views to economic aspects, some manufacturers in Mulhouse proved

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<sup>16</sup> Alfred Picard, *Le bilan d'un siècle (1801-1900), Tome quatrième, Mines et métallurgie. Industries de la décoration et du mobilier. Chauffage et ventilation. Éclairage non électrique. Fils, tissus, vêtements* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1906), 106.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Zuber-Karth, "Rapport fait au nom de la commission d'enquête de Mulhausen, relativement aux manufactures de coton," in *Bulletin général et universel des annonces et des nouvelles scientifiques, Tome vingt-septième*, ed. André Étienne d'Audebert de Férussac (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1831), 152-154.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Jacqué, "Note sur Mulhouse et la traite des Noirs," *Annuaire historique de Mulhouse* 30 (2019), 56.

<sup>19</sup> Literature on the subject is abundant. Major research works include Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les Traités négrières, essai d'histoire globale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); Frédéric Régent, *La France et ses esclaves: De la colonisation aux abolitions (1620-1848)* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 2007); Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Alan Forrest, *The Death of the French Atlantic: Trade, War, and Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Based on reports of ships seized by French royal authorities, the illegal French slave trade of the nineteenth century has been assessed by Serge Daget, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises à la traite illégale: 1814-1850* (Nantes, France: Comité nantais d'études en sciences humaines, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Denis Guthleben, "La guerre de Sécession vue par l'Industriel Alsacien" (Master's thesis, Université de Haute-Alsace, 1999), 31.

their reluctance to criticize a system that helped provide the raw material fueling their industry. Their stance outraged French abolitionists.<sup>22</sup>

The complex relationship of Zuber's wallpaper imagery and economic networks to systems of racial differentiation and enslavement was nowhere more prevalent than when scenic views were installed in homes within, or in immediate proximity to, the so-called U.S. South, as the Winterthur Museum's acquisition of the *Views of North America's* fragments in 2018 demonstrates. The provenance of the fragments in question highlights the popularity of Zuber's creations among smaller communities in the process of developing economically before the 1860s across the United States.

This particular set most likely originated from the now-demolished house of Chauncey Humiston Andrews (1823–1893), in Youngstown, Ohio, a residence whose furnishings were meant to uphold its owner's respectability as a new, wealthy, white entrepreneur. The son of an innkeeper, Andrews had gradually improved his social standing to being a captain of industry with stakes in railroads and coal mining.<sup>23</sup> His influence was such that he was even considered a serious candidate for governor of Ohio.<sup>24</sup> Following his marriage to Louisa Baldwin (1835–1917) in 1857, the couple commissioned a house to be built at 750 Wick Avenue, Youngstown, for which the Zuber wallpaper was purchased, though its exact location within the space remains unclear.<sup>25</sup> The fruits of American commerce promoted in Zuber's views would have appealed to ambitious customers like Andrews, eager to ensure unchallenged control over a rising Black middle class perceived as a potential economic competitor by white middle classes in a free state like Ohio.<sup>26</sup> Bordered to the South by slaveholding Kentucky and Virginia, Ohio witnessed influxes of southern enslaved people and African American citizens in search of freedom and economic opportunities.

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<sup>22</sup> In 1863, for instance, journalist Eugène Pelletan (1813-1884) published a diatribe against slavery, ironically titled "An Address to King Cotton," that targeted Mulhouse manufacturers by name for their complacency. See Eugène Pelletan, *Adresse au Roi Coton* (New York: H. de Mareil, 1863), 11-12.

<sup>23</sup> Clayton J. Ruminski, *Iron Valley: The Transformation of the Iron Industry in Ohio's Mahoning Valley, 1802-1913* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2017), 98-99.

<sup>24</sup> "The Ohio Governorship," *The New York Times* XXXII, no. 9839 (April 1, 1883), 3.

<sup>25</sup> William Joseph Palmer, "To Raise the Standard of Architecture: The Work and Vision of Charles Henry and Charles Frederick Owsley in Youngstown, Ohio" (Master's thesis, Youngstown State University, 2000), 42-43. The will of Chauncey H. Andrews was probated on January 3, 1894; however, it has been impossible to determine the presence of any wallpaper from this document alone. The microfilmed document containing details of Andrews' possessions has been damaged. Georgene Fry (historian, Mahoning County Probate Court), email to the author, October 2021.

<sup>26</sup> On this subject, see Henry Louis Taylor, "John Mercer Langston and the Cincinnati Riot of 1841," in *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970*, ed. Taylor (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 29-69. For a history of race relations in Cincinnati in the early nineteenth century, see Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005).

Located halfway between Cleveland and Pittsburgh, Youngstown itself stood at the center of one of several routes of the Underground Railroad, crossing the Mahoning River Valley toward a passage to Canada via Lake Erie. Less than eight miles from Andrews' house, the village of Austintown was a stop on one such route.<sup>27</sup> Chauncey Andrews's own father Norman had actually hosted both William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879) and Frederick Douglass (1817–1895) at his Youngstown hotel in August 1847, as the two famed writers and orators participated in three abolitionist meetings in town.<sup>28</sup>

Garrison and Douglass' visit suggests that Youngstown was a place of opposing ideologies during the antebellum period, which is even more significant to consider when noticing that a specific element in the background of Deltil's West Point tableau may have been read ambiguously in the eyes of a customer like Andrews. Indeed, the artist included two Black figures markedly different from the others to the right of the composition (fig. 5). A man and a woman seem to emerge from a dense



Figure 5. Jean Zuber and Jean-Julien Deltil, detail of *Views of North America*, 1834 [reprinted 1960s], woodblock-printed wallpaper, 12 ft 9 ½ in. x 49 ft 4 ⅛ in. Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France. Photograph by the author.

wilderness. Their garments are far less luxurious than those of the Black figures promenading at the forefront. While these groups appear engaged in leisurely activities, the isolated couple is clearly coded as part of a laboring class: their scant possessions hint strongly at their impoverished condition and accentuate an impression of distress. It is plausible that wallpaper owners, in states like Ohio, may have read in these two figures a reference to the thousands of enslaved African Americans who were indeed running toward freedom at the time. In Deltil's tableau, the man's gesture toward a large American flag flying over the landscape may further hint at their still precarious

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<sup>27</sup> Ronald Wesley Strock, *The Descendants of Joseph Strock of 1757* (Osceola, IN: Self-Published, 1984), 229. See also Bruce Chadwick, *Traveling the Underground Railroad: A Visitor's Guide to More Than 300 Sites* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing, 1999), 193.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Frederick Douglass, Austinburg, Ohio, to Sydney Howard Gay, New York City, August 20, 1847. Reproduced in John R. McKivigan *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series Three, Correspondence, Volume 1, 1842-1852*, ed. John R. McKivigan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 236.

situation, equating the figures to self-emancipated people.<sup>29</sup> Hidden for now, these two figures seem on the brink of joining the U.S. polity, a prospect that would have been uncomfortable to some white viewers.



Figure 6. Jean Broc and Joseph Dufour, *Paul and Virginie Meet the Master of the Fugitive Slave*, 1824, woodblock-printed wallpaper, 6 ft 7 in. x 6 ft 11 in. Source: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France. © Paris, MAD/Jean Tholance.

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<sup>29</sup> This type of gesture was later reprised in transatlantic visual works celebrating emancipation. German painter Theodor Kaufmann (1814–1896), for instance, symbolically enacted the transition of enslaved figures from absence to presence in his painting *On to Liberty* (1867). The picture, presenting African American individuals shedding their invisibility for visibility, was inspired by an 1859 sketch of French artist François Auguste Biard (1799–1882), which he completed in Brazil and later displayed in New York City. Sympathetic to abolitionist causes, Kaufmann depicted the group running to an open field as they aim at a large U.S. flag far away in the distance. On Biard's painting and its influence on Kaufmann, see Amandine Piel, "Un peintre abolitionniste?" in *François Auguste Biard, Peintre Voyageur*, ed. Gérard Audinet (Paris: Paris Musées, 2020), 112; and Adriano Pedrosa and Tomás Toledo, eds., *Afro-Atlantic Histories* (New York: DelMonico Books, 2021), 108. On the composition of Kaufmann's painting, see Margaret C. Conrads, "Stories of War and Reconciliation, 1860-1877," in *American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915*, eds. H. Barbara Weinberg and Carrie Rebora Barratt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 89.

In that sense, the fleeing couple would be more closely related to the representation of Black people in French décors like *Paul et Virginie*, marketed in 1824 by Zuber's main competitor, Joseph Dufour (1754–1827). Inspired by the novel of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814), the plot includes the harrowing scene of a woman in bondage throwing herself at the feet of the young Virginie to ask for forgiveness after deserting a plantation. The episode, set on the French-occupied island of Mauritius, became central to the wallpaper (fig. 6).<sup>30</sup> As in the *Views of North America*, Dufour's décor equates the figure of the self-emancipated bondsperson with a state of wilderness and unordered nature, in contrast to the tidy layout of plantations, cities, or army camps. In Dufour's scene, however, Black individuals are stripped almost entirely. Undressed, vulnerable, and invisible, these figures were entirely exposed to the white gaze and its control.<sup>31</sup> In both wallpapers, the inclusion of Black characters roaming free were thus susceptible to reflecting fears of racial unrest experienced by the white upper class of Europe and North America. The degrading representation of Black people in the wallpapers of transatlantic domestic spaces helped assuage white anxieties by promising an uncertain future, and sometimes retribution, to those people of color resisting a naturalized racial order.

Meanwhile, in an antebellum U.S. South connected by trade routes to the rest of the Atlantic World, the purchase and installation of scenic French wallpapers would precisely become intertwined with the built environment of slave plantations. Pierre Denis de la Ronde (1762–1824), for instance, relied on enslaved labor to develop his property in Chalmette, Louisiana, reshaping the landscape into a series of sugarcane fields and eventually building a mansion in 1805. The estate, later known as "Versailles," made de la Ronde one of the most prosperous planters in Orleans Parish. Frequent resistance on the part of individuals he enslaved however pushed him to require the services of a newly-formed police [*gendarmerie*] in 1811 to maintain order on his

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<sup>30</sup> Denys Prache, *Joseph Dufour: Génie des papiers peints* (Paris: Mare & Martin, 2016), 270. See also Elisabeth Leprêtre, *Paul et Virginie: un exotisme enchanteur* (Paris: Chaudun, 2014), 53.

<sup>31</sup> The idea of dressing/undressing, or robing/disrobing, non-white figures in nineteenth-century American visual culture in order to express racial control has been explored in Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, "The Insistent Reveal: Louis Agassiz, Joseph T. Zealy, Carrie Mae Weems, and the Politics of Undress in the Photography of Racial Science," in *To Make Their Own Way in the World: The Enduring Legacy of the Zealy Daguerreotypes*, eds. Ilisa Barbash, Molly Rogers, and Deborah Willis (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press, 2020), 297-325.

plantation.<sup>32</sup> De la Ronde transformed a bayou into a landscape of oversight, imposing a strict racial control that workers and visitors could perceive.<sup>33</sup>

De la Ronde's influence extended into the city of New Orleans itself, where he had forged networks and owned a townhouse on Chartres Street.<sup>34</sup> The city itself, as a major harbor, also provided him with the opportunity to purchase imported transatlantic objects, like furniture made in Europe, to help the construction of his identity as planter. Sometime before his death, he acquired Zuber's 1820 *Grande Helvétie* décor, representing a Swiss pasture scene (fig. 7). Although the location of the wallpaper inside his mansion, destroyed by a hurricane in 1915, has yet to be established, its presence on the estate is attested by the survival of fragments.<sup>35</sup> Within De la Ronde's domestic space, a product such as *La Grande Helvétie* would have offered an appealing vision of peaceful human development, respectful of



Figure 7. Jean Zuber and Pierre-Antoine Mongin, *La Grande Helvétie* [fragment], 1820, woodblock-printed wallpaper, dimensions unknown. Source: Special Collections, Tulane University Libraries, New Orleans, Louisiana.

nature. Its bucolic and idealized views made the (enslaved) landscape of the U.S. South intelligible within the context of a transatlantic Euro-American pastoralism, erasing the

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<sup>32</sup> Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec, "Slave Migrations and Slave Control in Spanish and Early American New Orleans," in *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase*, eds. Peter J. Kastor and François Weil (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 228.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 49-50.

<sup>34</sup> Leonard V. Huber, *Landmarks of New Orleans* (New Orleans, LA: Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1984), 15.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Zuber, et. al. Wallpaper, Collection 83, Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Libraries, New Orleans, Louisiana. After examining floorplans, wallpaper scholar Ed Polk Douglas has advanced that the most likely location of the paper within de la Ronde's house would be a second-floor room, i.e., a less public-facing space. Ed Polk Douglas, email to the author, December 2021.

intrinsic violence of its settlement and exploitation, as well as reinforcing the white identity construction of a natural order of human races within nature.

The claims of respectability and wealth made by slaveholding Southerners using French scenic wallpaper are especially marked in a case where Zuber wallpapers were turned into a visual language for the community's white elite. Clinton was located in central Georgia, on Mvskoke (Muscogee/Creek) land. Due to its geographical position and agricultural status, the community fashioned itself as a frontier outpost, an identity facilitated by the town's proximity to the Ocmulgee River, which until 1821 marked the border between Mvskoke lands and lands appropriated by Euro-Americans.<sup>36</sup>

This period also witnessed the organization of a community culture based on its fertile environment. Similar to places like Chalmette, the environment of Clinton was reinterpreted through a transatlantic vocabulary of landed gentry, which marginalized the racial foundations of its success. In 1820, for instance, the U.S. Census estimated that enslaved Black individuals represented more than 60% of the town's population.<sup>37</sup> Their reality of bondage and poverty co-existed with the identity-building enterprise of Clinton's slaveholders, who promoted the town as a bustling and respectable hub.<sup>38</sup> Projecting this image, houses in town adopted the stately architectural style of the Greek Revival and were furnished with imported objects.<sup>39</sup> Scenic French wallpapers entered into the makeup of these built environments.

Zuber's commercial networks reached this area of the United States early on, with customers in Augusta, Georgia, as early as the 1830s.<sup>40</sup> Clinton merchants and slaveholders, in turn, used scenic wallpaper as a token of economic privilege and a justification of their exploitation of natural resources. Among them was merchant Peter Lee Clower, Sr. (1775–1851). Clower saw the completion of his house in 1819 as a way to present himself as an established businessman.<sup>41</sup> The purchase and installation of scenic wallpaper designs helped stress the degree of his wealth while symbolically obfuscating the racial relations of domination that enabled it in the first place; in 1820, Clower was indeed enslaving twenty-eight individuals.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Old Clinton Historical Society, *A Historical Guide to Clinton, Georgia, An Early Nineteenth Century County Seat* (Gray, GA: Old Clinton Historical Society, 1975), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Old Clinton Historical Society, *A Historical Guide to Clinton*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Solomon Hoge, "Mansion House," *Macon Telegraph* 1, no. 28 (May 7, 1827), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Carolyn White Williams, *History of Jones County, Georgia, For One Hundred Years, Specifically, 1807-1907* (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke Company, 1957), 702.

<sup>40</sup> Z 87, *Statistique de vente aux États-Unis, 1836-1844*, Archives Zuber, Musée du Papier peint, Rixheim, France.

<sup>41</sup> Williams, *History of Jones County*, 198.

<sup>42</sup> William Lamar Cawthon, Jr., "Clinton: County Seat on the Georgia Frontier, 1808-1821" (Master's thesis, University of Georgia, 1984), 189.

One décor quickly acquired by Clower was Zuber's 1831 *Paysage à Chasses* [Hunting Landscape], a décor purchased at the same time by U.S. president Martin Van Buren (1782–1862) for his house, "Lindenwald," in Kinderhook, New York.<sup>43</sup> The design offers an idealized vision of the English gentry occupied with the eponymous activity within a lavish countryside. Under the shadow of ruined castles, a group of indolent figures is even seen leisurely picnicking at one end of the design as dogs pursue deer through marshlands. If both Van Buren and Clower could claim high social standing through their purchase of this Zuber design, its imagery would, however, have reflected two different approaches to privilege.

Posing as a gentleman farmer in Kinderhook, Van Buren remodeled the grounds of Lindenwald in an English garden style.<sup>44</sup> Used to welcome his guests and political allies, the space became the set of Van Buren's political staging, frequented by partisans of free labor and the so-called Barnburners faction of the Democratic Party, who opposed slavery and antagonized the South.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, in Augusta, Georgia, Clower would have perceived a radically opposite message in Zuber's scenes: a vindication of his status as a slaveholding planter and of his right to consume the resources of a slavery frontier, in the manner of an English landowner. In fact, his racial and economic exploitation would continue to increase. In 1850, Peter Clower was enslaving seventy-four individuals, plus an additional forty-seven people "co-owned" with his son Green A. Clower (1805–1877).<sup>46</sup>

In Clinton, as in Chalmette and Youngstown, Zuber's creations often reflected a certain ambiguous attitude towards racial relations, and their visuals could be easily adapted to suit the needs and ideologies of its various buyers. In the early nineteenth century, these discursive adjustments frequently revolved around Black figures, perhaps the most complicated elements of designs created by Deltil and others. Whether or not their buyers perceived a vindication of their elite status in the imagery of sets like *Views of North America*, these décors helped reaffirm the crucial role of a racialized

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<sup>43</sup> Maryellen Higginbotham, "Bits and Pieces, Paper and Pattern: Researching Wallpaper in Nineteenth-Century Vernacular Georgia," in *Georgia Inside and Out: Architecture, Landscape, and Decorative Arts: Proceedings from the Second Henry D. Green Symposium of the Decorative Arts*, ed. Ashley Callahan (Athens, GA: Georgia Museum of Art, 2005), 34.

<sup>44</sup> Leonard L. Richards, Marla R. Miller, and Erik Gil, *A Return to his Native Town: Martin Van Buren's Life at Lindenwald, 1839-1862* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2006), 30-33.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 161-167. See also Michael Todd Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 40-41.

<sup>46</sup> Slave Schedules, Division 47, Jones County, Georgia, Record Group Number 29, M432, Seventh Census of The United States, 1850, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



transatlantic landscape in devising and projecting multiple white American identities. From France to Ohio, Georgia, or Louisiana, these fantasized scenes of nature were met with an interest that an entrepreneur like Jean Zuber knew how to exploit.

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