



## MAP QUILT

Artist unidentified

Possibly Virginia; 1886

Silk and cotton with silk embroidery; 78 ¾ × 82 ¼"

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. C. David McLaughlin, 1987.1.1

Photo by Schechter Lee, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1845, John O’Sullivan, editor of the *United States Magazine and Domestic Review*, wrote that it was “our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”\* “Manifest Destiny” became a catchphrase for American expansionism, which was virtually completed by the time this quilt in the form of a map of the United States was made. By 1886, the date that is embroidered in Roman numerals along the border between Oregon and Washington, America stretched “from sea to shining sea,” anticipating Katherine Lee Bate’s 1895 anthem. The Missouri and Mississippi rivers are highlighted in blue fabric with embroidery, and Texas, which recently had been a separate independent nation, is distinguished from the rest of the country by the inclusion of a stitched yellow star. Additional embroidered elements appear on Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Iowa, and Illinois.

A high degree of embellishment with embroidery, paint, and other elements was typical of show quilts made during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This textile was made at the height of the Crazy quilt and show quilt era. Although the map is an unusual treatment in the show quilt idiom, there is a long precedent for depictions of maps on fabric—in the early nineteenth century, young women stitched sampler maps and three-dimensional fabric globes as part of their geography lessons. Few examples of pieced quilts in the form of maps exist today, however. Instructions for right-angle piecing—the Y-shaped

pattern that is used for the background for this quilt—were published in late-nineteenth-century English and American sources.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson.

*American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln: [www.quiltstudy.org](http://www.quiltstudy.org)

McMorris, Penny. *Crazy Quilts*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984.

National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., “Quilts, Counterpanes & Throws: A Selection from the National Collection”: [www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts)

The Quilt Index: [www.quiltindex.org](http://www.quiltindex.org)

Warren, Elizabeth V., and Sharon L. Eisenstat.

*Glorious American Quilts: The Quilt Collection of the Museum of American Folk Art*. New York: Penguin Studio in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1996.

\* Sean Wilentz, ed., *Major Problems in the Early Republic, 1787–1848* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1992), p. 525.

# A MAP OF MANIFEST DESTINY

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What strikes you about this image?
- What comparisons can we make between this map and a modern-day map of the United States?
- What can we say about the way this object was made?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- This quilt was created from many different types of fabric. Where might these textiles have come from? What does the inclusion of these fabrics reveal about the artist's life or culture?
- What geographical and physical features figure prominently in the quilt?
- How does the anonymous quiltmaker comment on the nation's expansion and recent history? How does the quilt speak to the state of mind of former Confederates?
- Several states on the *Map Quilt* include an embroidered element, such as the star in Texas. Because embroidery was highly popular in 1886, when it was made, and because these elements appear sporadically, scholars believe this quilt was likely a "work in progress," and unfinished. Consider carefully the embroidered elements that appear on Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Texas, Iowa, and Illinois. How do these symbols relate to the states on which they are depicted, if at all? What symbols could the artist have included on other states?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- How are the functions of a quilt similar to the functions of a nation?
- In recent maps of the United States, how have colors been used to illustrate political features?
- This map quilt features three major American rivers. What role have these rivers played in the history of the United States?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students create a map of a familiar space or community, considering ways to highlight special features in the area, such as political leanings, cultural groups, disease incidence, temperature range, etc.
- Invite a quiltmaker to visit the class to demonstrate quilting techniques. Following the presentation, students can create their own collaborative quilt.
- Ask students to "map" an American state of mind—say, by choosing a decade to illustrate. Use the United States political boundaries as a "frame" for images that represent the state of mind, then use images from magazines and other popular media to fill in those boundaries.