

Antique or Junque: African-American art appeals

by Anne McCollam

Q: Last fall my husband and I bought the art deco woodblock print seen in this photo at an antiques shop. The dealer told us he bought it from a collector and he didn't know much about the print. It is in pristine condition and is signed "E.M. Washington" and dated 1934. We recently had it framed and the overall measurements without the frame are 10 inches by 12 inches.

WOODBLOCK PRINT - This Americana print would probably be valued in the \$100 to \$300 range, unframed. CNS Photo.

REMY DELINIERES MARK - Remy Delinieres and Co. of Limoges, France, was in business from 1879 to 1900. In 1900 they became L. Bernardaud and Co. and are still in business. CNS Illustration.

What can you tell me about our print?

A: Bert Williams, the figure featured in the print, was a famous and talented African-American vaudeville singer and entertainer. He was born in 1875 and performed on stages from the United States to England. Star and comedian of early films W.C. Fields was said to have believed Williams was one of the funniest men he knew. The Palace Theatre was located in New York City. E.M. Washington is a name shrouded in mystery and controversy. Contemporary artist Earl Marshawn Washington has claimed the prints are attributed to his great-grandfather Earl Mack Washington, who lived from 1862 to 1952. Information provided by Washington is problematic. He is not always consistent with his explanations, and there is some doubt that the elder Washington ever existed. The woodblock is suspected to be a recent creation by Earl Marshawn Washington in his Michigan studio and marketed as an early print. Your print is dated 1934, which is 12 years after Bert Williams died.

Despite all the mystery and debate swirling around your print, it appears to have appeal to some collectors of black Americana and woodblock prints. The value would probably be in the \$100 to \$300 range, unframed.

Q: Enclosed is the mark that is on back of a porcelain plate I have. The plate is 9 inches in diameter and decorated with the image of the composer, Johann Strauss Jr. I am 83 years old and the plate belonged to my grandmother who had it hanging on the wall over her piano for years when I was growing up. It is in perfect condition.

Can you tell me the year it might have been made and what its approximate value is?

A: Remy Delinieres and Co. made your plate. They were located in Limoges, France, from 1879 to 1900. In 1900 they became L. Bernardaud and Co. and are still in business.

The value of your circa 1900 plate would probably be \$200 to \$300.

Q: When I was about 7 years old, I wanted a toy train so badly I told everyone from the mailman to the traffic cop that I wanted a train. That year I got three of them for Christmas! A Lionel freight train, a Lionel passenger train, and a Marx wind-up passenger train.

I have seen prices for both the Marx wind-up and the Lionel freight train, but not for the Lionel passenger train.

I am curious about what it might be worth.

A: Lionel passenger trains vary in value depending on condition, vintage, size, and how many pieces in a set. You didn't mention when you received your train. If it is a pre-World War II mint condition set and has a locomotive, three cars, a tender, and the original boxes, the value would probably be in the range of \$2,000 to \$5,000. By comparison, a similar postwar set would probably be \$1,500 to \$2,000.

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