

Slavery North

Excavating Canadian Slavery and Other Un(der)studied Sites

Organized by: Dr. Charmaine A. Nelson, Professor of Art History, Tier I Canada Research Chair in Transatlantic Black Diasporic Art and Community Engagement, and Director of the Institute for the Study of Canadian Slavery

Research Assistants: Emily Davidson and Achini Pabasara Ranasinghe
Ranasinghege

List of Participants (alphabetical order):

Jesse Bucher

Name:

Dr. Jesse Bucher, Associate Professor of History, Director of the Center for Studying Structures of Race, and the David F. Bittle College Historian

Affiliation:

Department of History, Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, USA

Bio:

Jesse Bucher is Director of the Center for Studying Structures of Race, and the David F. Bittle College Historian at Roanoke College. He has a PhD in African History from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities where he was a MacArthur Scholar at the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change. Prior to arriving at Roanoke College in 2012, he was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Humanities Research at University of the Western Cape. Bucher's earlier research utilized postcolonial and critical theory to interpret the history of political violence, colonialism, and racial politics in both Tanzania and South Africa. He has further worked on projects related to histories of public commemoration, memorialization, and monuments. He is currently researching the history of enslavement at and around Roanoke College. In partnership with the arts organization Creative Time, he is coordinating a campus-community public art project to create a permanent monument to enslaved persons of southwest Virginia.

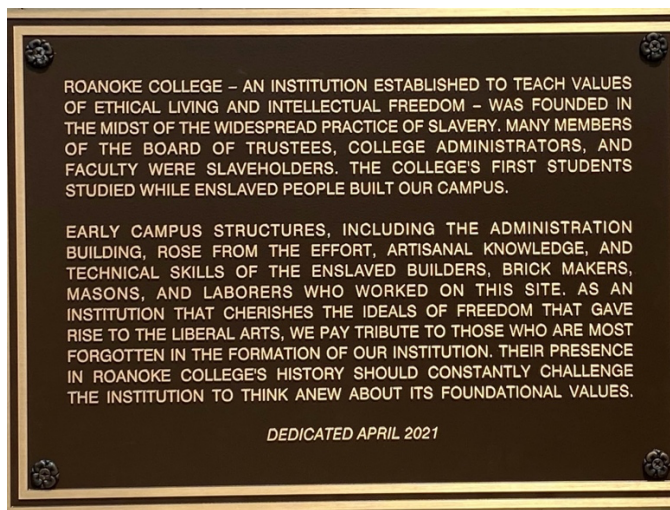
Presentation Title:

Histories and Historiographies of Slavery in Southwest Virginia

Abstract:

This presentation examines new research on the history of slavery in southwest Virginia. The research traces some of the distinct practices of slavery in southwest Virginia, and particularly focuses on labor practices of the enslaved people who worked as skilled artisans. The presentation further contextualizes historiographical claims made through popular and public mediums about the history of slavery in Virginia. Many existent interpretations have, over time, been folded into narratives of regional exceptionalism that help to explain the enduring presence of public monuments to the Confederacy. Finally, the presentation will explain how the Center for Studying Structures of Race at Roanoke College utilizes public art and archival research to reinterpret histories and historical legacies of enslavement.

Image:



Images caption:

Plaque honoring enslaved workers at Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia. Dedicated April, 2021.

Chris J. Gismondi

Name: Chris J. Gismondi, PhD Candidate History

Affiliation:

Department of History, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, Canada

Bio:

Chris (he/they) is a queer, white, Qallunaak-zhaaganaash-Settler, first generation “Canadian” of Scottish and Italian descent, born and raised on Nanzuhzaugewazog, Dish with One Spoon, Head of the Lake Treaty no. 14 (1806), Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory. Chris is a PhD Candidate at the University of New Brunswick completing his doctoral project under the guidance of Dr. Charmaine A. Nelson. His Doctoral and Master’s work have been sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and he also serves on the Advisory Board for the Institute for the Study of Canadian Slavery. His curatorial work has spanned institutions like La Guild,

Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, and Government of Ontario Art Collection. Along with Dr. Nelson and an undergraduate seminar he contributed to the grassroots report, “Slavery and McGill University: Bicentenary Recommendations” and three other public facing projects. His writing has been published in Canadian Art, Canadian Art Review, The English Historical Review, Esse: art + opinions, Peripheral Review, and Arcadia: Environment and Society.

Presentation Title:

Chloe and Bet: Unearthing the Temperate Slavery Archive of Upper Canada

Abstract:

Scholars of Transatlantic Slavery piece together lives of enslaved subjects from biased, derogatory, and incomplete fragments in the archive. For understudied temperate sites like Upper Canada, what is currently Ontario, the archive comes with additional challenges from a minority enslaved population. My inquiry of the archive is rooted around the Black female experience, gradual abolition, and family preservation in Upper Canada and the American North. Canada and Britain, until recently have both evaded scrutiny for their practices of Transatlantic Slavery but fugitive slave advertisements have become a significant and useful source on both sides of the Atlantic. They record enslaved or bound labour in places where such histories have been suppressed, but also document the resistance to slavery in moments like gradual abolition through the strategy of flight. Gradual abolition is noteworthy since families, and women’s reproduction were implicated in the process of phasing out slavery with generational clauses and was legislated first in Pennsylvania, then Upper Canada, and lastly New York. This paper presents some of the theory and unearthed documents guiding my doctoral research and the archival encounters informed from theorists like Jacques Derrida, Marissa J. Fuentes, and Saidiya Hartman. I re-read and expand fragments to consider Sophie White, Trevor Burnard, and Afua Cooper’s concept of slave testimony, the pursuit to reclaim biography informed by Jenny Shaw, and the fugitive slave advertisement as narrative and portrait theorized from Maureen Elgersman and Charmaine A. Nelson respectively.

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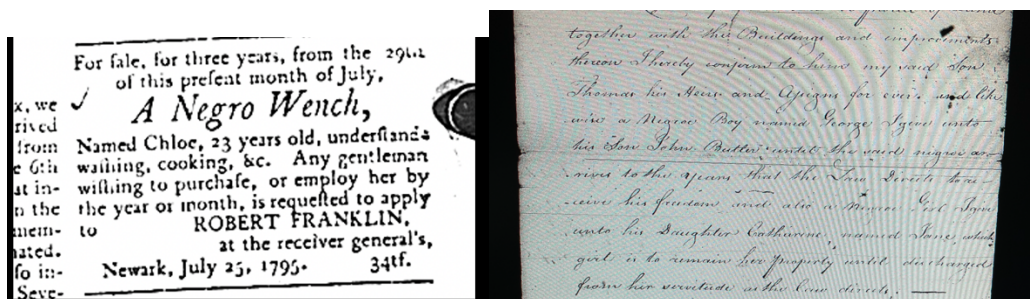


Image caption:

Right: “Chloe”, August 19, 1795, 2.37, Upper Canada Gazette, AN61 U66 microfilm

Left: “Will of John Butler”, John Butler, Probate Estate files, MS 638 Reel 41 (RG 22-155), Archives of Ontario

Ingeborg Høvik

Name:

Dr. Ingeborg Høvik, Associate Professor of Art History

Affiliation:

Department of Language and Culture, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway

Bio:

Ingeborg Høvik received her PhD from the University of Edinburgh and is Associate Professor of Art History at UiT the Arctic University of Norway. Between 2014 and 2017 she was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Women's and Gender Research, UiT. She has been a Caird Short-term Research Fellow at the National Maritime Museum, London (2008), a guest researcher at Linnaeus University Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies (2015), and a visiting researcher at Greenland National Museum and Archives (2015, 2019). Her research interests are representations of the Arctic in European and Inuit art and visual culture, and, more recently, the history and visual culture of slavery. Her latest publication is “Negotiating Meaning: John Møller’s Photographs in Early Twentieth-Century Scandinavian Literature” in Adjusting the Lens: Indigenous Activism, Colonial Legacies, and Photographic Heritage, edited by Sigrid Lien and Hilde Wallem Nielssen (UBC 2021). In the period 2020 to 2024, she manages Arctic Voices in Art and Literature in the Long 19th Century, an international research project funded by the Research Council of Norway.

Presentation Title:

Art History and slavery in Norway

Abstract:

In the recently closed building of the National Gallery in Oslo, Christian Krogh's enormous history painting, Leiv Eriksson Discovers America (313 x 470 cm), used to hang in the large, main stairwell. Originally presented at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, Krogh's painting loudly asserted that a Norseman (Viking) was the first “discoverer” of America and that Eriksson (ca. 973-1020) beat Columbus by 500 years. The painting resonated well with the period's strong nationalism, where the dominant discourse considered the Norwegian people a North-Germanic *Urvolk*, a pure and unmixed, white race that were the direct descendants of the brave and manly seafaring discoverers represented in Krogh's painting. This lasting construction of national history and identity did not, however, consider the other transatlantic voyages in which Norwegians took an active part.

In fact, the more than 300 years of Norwegian participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and slavery in the colonies still receives little attention in Norwegian history and art history today. A consequence of this absence, is the perpetuation of a Norwegian myth of innocence and detachment from any involvement in the larger history of European colonialism. In my first contribution to research on the representation of slavery in Norwegian art and visual culture, I will present a historiographical overview of the state of the study of Norwegian slavery. This is followed by an initial overview and discussion of relevant objects and visual material held in national archives and museum collections in Norway.

Images:



Image captions:

Left: Christian Krogh, *Leiv Eriksson oppdager Amerika*, 1893. (Leiv Eriksson Discovers America).

Right: Nicolas Cammilleri, *Kongen af Assianthe, Comm. Af Capt. Ole Ugland./ IL*, 1806

Andrew Hunter

Name:

Andrew Hunter

Affiliation:

Independent author/curator/artist, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Bio:

Andrew Hunter is a freelance author, artist, curator and educator whose multi-faceted work has long focussed on the stories of those marginalized and erased by whiteness, colonialism and capitalism. Born in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (where he currently lives), he is a graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design. He has held curatorial positions across Canada and produced exhibitions and writings for institutions internationally. He has taught at the Ontario College of Art and Design University and the University of Waterloo and lectured on curatorial practice and the writing of history across Canada, the United States, England, China, and Croatia. Hunter regularly writes and lectures on institutions of culture and history, the erasure of histories, the marginalization of cultures by colonial institutions, and the responsibilities and accountabilities of settler communities and *whiteness*, most recently at Harvard University, University of Glasgow, and McGill University, and in the keynote talks at the 2018 *Archives Association of Ontario Conference* at Laurier University and the 2018 *Saskatchewan Artists Association Conference* at University of Saskatchewan.

At heart, Hunter's work is inter-disciplinary, incorporating writing, visual art, performance and media, as well as academic and archival research and story-telling. He fully acknowledges his status as a settler, and is committed to collaboratively developing and sharing

new approaches that break from colonial models and embrace the need for the genuine critical decentering of *whiteness*. In addition, the mental health of individuals, communities and cultures is of fundamental importance to his life and work.

Presentation Title:

I Know Not For How Long: Finding Sophia (alone and in company)

Abstract:

“...came into the garden where my sister and I were playing among the currant bushes, tied their handkerchiefs over our mouths, carried us to a vessel, put us in the hold, and sailed up the river. I know not how far nor how long — it was dark there all the time.” – Sophia Burthen (Pooley), quoted from interview published in *A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee*, by Benjamin Drew (1856)

Sophia Burthen’s account of her arrival as an enslaved person into what is now Canada sometime in the late eighteenth century, was recorded by Benjamin Drew in 1855. In his new book *It Was Dark There All the Time: Sophia Burthen and the Legacy of Slavery in Canada* [Goose Lane Editions, 2022], Andrew Hunter builds on the testimony of Drew’s interview to piece together Burthen’s life, while reckoning with the legacy of whiteness and colonialism in the recording of her story. In so doing, Hunter demonstrates the role that the slave trade played in pre-Confederation Canada and its continuing impact on contemporary Canadian society.

Hunter’s presentation is shaped in direct response to the focus of the workshop. In particular, he will engage with the concept of *excavation* (with its links to archeology, landscape and labour). Hunter’s writings and research are deeply connected with seeking to understand place, memory and presence in the physical traces and living environments of the largely erased and marginalized individuals and communities with whom he is in dialogue. Hunter sees the writing of history as a journey that must be collaborative and build community, and be situated in a non-linear engagement with time and space.

“Where do we live? And who is this *we*? What’s the range of assumption behind the question? Who’s included? Who’s excluded? Increasingly I’m finding myself interested in range, in how variation takes place over a geographic space—I’m thinking of populations—human and otherwise—and customs and identifications and, God knows, landscape.” – C.S. Giscombe (discussing his book *Prairie Style*, from an interview with The Poetry Foundation)

Hunter will also discuss the profound influence of the writings of **C. S. Giscombe** (poet, essayist, and professor of English at University of California, Berkeley) on his writing and process.

Image:



Image Caption:

Sophia Burthen Way: Sophia Burthen (Pooley) lived *HERE*, in Ancaster Township, enslaved in the home of Samuel and Margaret Hatt (circa 1806-1815).

Sophia Burthen memory sign by Andrew Hunter, an unauthorized public history intervention in Dundas (Hamilton), Ontario, 2021.

Aly Ndiaye, a.k.a. Webster

Name:

Aly Ndiaye, a.k.a. Webster

Affiliation:

Independent author, curator and artist, Quebec City, Canada

Bio:

Aly Ndiaye, a.k.a. Webster, has always been passionate about the history of slavery as well as the presence of Africans and people of African descent in Quebec and Canada since the start of New France. He regularly gives lectures on this subject and has put together the Quebec History X tours in Old Quebec. In 2019, Webster presented Fugitives! at Quebec National Museum of Fine Arts. This exhibition was based on eighteenth-century advertisements that were published in Quebec's newspapers to recover enslaved runaways. This project was a way to show how captives used to resist slavery in a setting where armed rebellion was not an option. The same year, Webster published a children's book about Olivier Le Jeune, Le Grain de Sable (The Grain of Sand), he also had him recognized as the first black person of historical importance by the government of Quebec and a commemorative plaque was erected at the place where he lived.

Presentation Title:

Between shadow and light: How to develop African-Canadian markers by democratizing the knowledge of Quebec Slavery for the general population

Abstract:

Since Viger and Lafontaine's De l'esclavage en Canada in 1859, many people have written about the history of slavery in Quebec. However, it is still quite unknown to the population at large. How do we get past the initiate and scholar's circle? How can the history of slavery and the presence of people of African descent in Quebec become common knowledge? Hip-hop artist Webster has set up on a path to bridge the scholarly works and Quebec's collective knowledge about its own history of slavery and resistance to this practice. Through different artistic projects, such as a guided tour, the Fugitives! exhibition and a children's book about Olivier Le Jeune (Le Grain de Sable), he tries to democratize access to a forgotten past.

Image:



Image caption:

Webster and Valmo, Le grain de sable : Olivier Le Jeune, premier esclave au Canada, cover, (Québec: Septentrion, 2019)

Charmaine A. Nelson

Name:

Dr. Charmaine A. Nelson, Professor of Art History, Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Black Diasporic Art and Community Engagement, Director – Institute for the Study of Canadian Slavery

Affiliation:

Division of Art History and Contemporary Culture, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Bio:

Charmaine A. Nelson is a Professor of Art History and a Tier I Canada Research Chair in Black Diasporic Art and Community Engagement at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) University in Halifax, CANADA where she is also the founding director of the Institute for the Study of Canadian Slavery. Prior to this appointment she worked at McGill University (Montreal) for seventeen years (2003-2020) and at Western University (London, Ontario) for two (2001-2003). Nelson has made ground-breaking contributions to the fields of the Visual Culture of Slavery, Race and Representation, and Black Canadian Studies. She has published seven books including The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America (2007), Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (2016), and Towards an African Canadian Art History: Art, Memory, and Resistance (2018). Nelson has given over 280 lectures, papers, and talks across Canada, and the USA, and in Mexico, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, the UK, Central America, and the Caribbean. She is also actively engaged with lay audiences through her media work including ABC, CBC, CTV, BBC One, and PBS. She has blogged for the Huffington Post Canada and written for The Walrus. Nelson has held several prestigious fellowships and appointments including a Caird Senior Research Fellowship, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK (2007) and a Fulbright Visiting Research Chair, University of California – Santa Barbara (2010). She was recently the William Lyon Mackenzie King Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies at Harvard University (2017-2018) and a Fields of the Future Research Fellow at Bard Graduate Center in New York City (2021).

Presentation Title:

He “is supposed to have with him forged Certificates of his Freedom, and Passes”: Slavery, Mobility, and the Creolized Counter-Knowledge of Resistance”

Abstract:

On the 3rd of May 1767, a man named Andrew described as a “Mulatto Negro Slave” was listed in a fugitive slave advertisement in the Quebec Gazette. According to the James Crofton, the white enslaver who arranged for the notice to be printed, the twenty-three year old Maryland-born Andrew was remarkable “for being clean dress’d” (sic) and speaking four languages, but also because he was suspected of having with him “forged Certificates of his Freedom, and Passes.” Advertisements like the one placed for Andrew are not unusual in the understudied landscape of Canadian Slavery. The enslaved black communities of the regions that would become Canada, suffered from (like their fellow bondspeople in southern, more tropical sites) the direct control of their mobility by their enslavers. However, in a world where individual enslaved people came to be associated with specific white citizens, the nature of their slave minority status also made daily surveillance from the broader and dominantly white populations routine. This lecture explores the intersection of and conflicts between knowledge production and enslaved mobility. Drawing on an analysis of fugitive slave advertisements, passes, and other historical documents, this lecture explores the archival evidence of the limits of enslaved

mobility, the nature of white surveillance, and the possibilities of enslaved resistance and counter-knowledge within Quebec Slavery.

Image:



Image Caption:

James Crofton, "RUN-AWAY, from *James Crofton*." *Quebec Gazette*, 14 May 1767, vol. 124, p. 4; Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Gunvor Simonsen

Name:

Dr. Gunvor Simonsen, Associate Professor of History

Affiliation:

Department of History, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark

Bio:

Gunvor Simonsen specializes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Atlantic History. Her particular focus is on Caribbean cultural and social history although she also works with West African and Danish Atlantic History. In Simonsen's research she explores questions about government, gender, religion, and race in the US Virgin Islands when they were under Danish rule and known as the Danish West Indies. She is currently in charge of the research project [IN THE SAME SEA](#) funded by a consolidator grant from the European Research Council. Together with a multinational team of researchers and supported by digital tools, the team of IN THE SAME SEA will narrate the history of how the Lesser Antilles emerged as a common world of slavery and freedom, c. 1650's-1850's. The project runs from 2020 to 2025.

Presentation Title:

Small Craft Fugitives in the Lesser Antilles

Abstract:

In this presentation, I hope to begin to expand our understanding of fugitive practices in the Lesser Antilles. Drawing on evidence from British, Dutch, French and Danish collections, I hope to develop the argument that a new narrative of maritime marronage can be written by connecting this fugitive practice to the presence of a distinct small craft infrastructure in the Lesser Antilles. While the historiography of maritime marronage has centered on the single young man escaping slavery by signing on in the Atlantic fleet, I present a number of incidents that allow us a glimpse of how small open boats afforded fugitive opportunities to groups, in particular women and children, who are often excluded from our present historiography. Rural estates rather than harbor towns became fugitive spaces, and families rather than single individuals organized and executed escape.

Image:



Image Caption:

Map of St. Croix, c. 1750, by Cronenberg and Jægersberg.

Fredrik Thomasson

Name:

Dr. Fredrik Thomasson, Associate Professor of History

Affiliation:

Department of History, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Bio:

Fredrik Thomasson is Associate Professor of History at Uppsala University and works on the Swedish possession (1784–1878) of the Lesser Antilles island Saint Barthélemy. He has published extensively on various aspects of Swedish Caribbean colonialism (e.g. well received Jan. 2022 monograph on Swedish slave law and colonial justice). He is the instigator of the digitization of the Swedish St Barthélemy archive currently held in the Archives nationales d'outre-mer [French National Colonial Archives] and is the PI of the Swedish Caribbean Colonialism project 2019–2023 (funded by the Swedish Research Council, grant VR2018-06064, 14 368 000 SEK, c. 2 080 000 CAD).

Presentation Title:

The Saint Barthélemy Archive and Swedish Colonial Amnesia

Abstract:

When the Lesser Antilles island of Saint Barthélemy (aka St Barths) after 94 years as a Swedish colony was sold to France in 1878 the entire archive (c. 300 000 ms pages) was left on the island. It is now in the French National Colonial Archives in Aix-en-Provence. Despite disorder and lacunae, the archive is the major source on Swedish Caribbean colonial history and slavery. The relinquishing of the archive in 1878 was the starting point of the institutional forgetting of the colony. In my presentation I give account for my research group's work with the archive and discuss why it was left essentially uninvestigated until the 2010's. The history of the archive represents a metaphor for Swedish colonial amnesia and while the colony has become ever more topical during the last decade, this is rather due to a changing Swedish society than an effect of the work of academic historians.

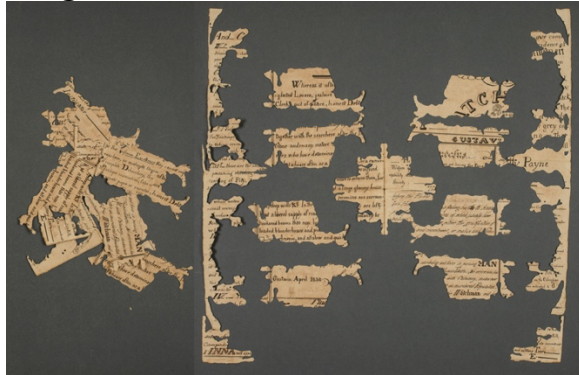
Image:**Image Caption:**

Image of handwritten satirical newspaper, The Watchman, published at Saint Barthélemy 1832.

Crystal Webster

Name:

Dr. Crystal Lynn Webster, Assistant Professor of History

Affiliation:

Department of History, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Bio:

Crystal Webster is a historian of slavery and childhood in early North America. She is Assistant Professor of History at the University of British Columbia. Webster received her PhD from the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro American Studies at the University of Massachusetts

Amherst. Webster's first book, Beyond the Boundaries of Childhood: African American Children in the Antebellum North (2021), is a social history of the transition of slavery to freedom in the antebellum U.S. North from the perspective of Black children. She recently completed a research fellowship from Yale's Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition for her next book, Criminalizing Freedom: African Americans and the Making of Criminal Reform in Early America. Additionally, her writing has appeared in the Washington Post, NY Times, and USA Today.

Presentation Title:

Black Childhood in the North: How Child-Centered Histories Challenge Geographic Boundaries of Slavery

Abstract:

Northern Black children in antebellum United States experienced complicated transitions from slavery to freedom. The main version of northern emancipation was gradual emancipation and one which specified freedom based on age. African Americans were emancipated only after they reached adulthood. Black children were indentured as part of this process, to places and individuals which reproduced conditions of enslavement. This paper illustrates the ways in which this history of emancipation of Black children alters and sharpens our understanding of slavery beyond the U.S. South, and argues that age had a particular function and purpose in the process of slavery and emancipation. Black children's enslavement and indenture in the U.S. North extended beyond gradual and even full emancipation, and in this way their experiences challenge typical categories and histories of childhood and adulthood, and slavery and freedom.

Image:



Image Caption:

Drawing of children at play in rural Pennsylvania, including Black indentured servant Rachel. Morris Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Harvey Amani Whitfield

Name:

Dr. Harvey Amani Whitfield, Professor of History

Affiliation:

Department of History, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Bio:

Harvey Amani Whitfield is a Professor of History at the University of Calgary. He is the author of several books about slavery in Colonial Canada, including Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860 (2006), North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes (2016), Black Slavery in the Maritimes: A History of Documents (2018), and the forthcoming Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes, which will be published with University of Toronto Press in March 2022.

Presentation Title:

Two Biographical Fragments of Enslaved Black Women in Colonial Canada

Abstract:

This paper will explore two Black women who left rather different imprints on the historical record. In the first case, we have Nancy an enslaved woman from Maryland who crops up in various sources in Loyalist New Brunswick, ranging from a runaway advertisement in 1786 to an important court case in 1800 and possibly to later documents as well. The second woman we will explore certainly had a name during her life that she used with her loved ones, but the commodification of Black bodies and the archival silences that various scholars have discussed make it impossible for historians to retrieve her name. However, a for sale notice in the 1752 Halifax Gazette tells us a fair amount about this woman in terms of her occupational skills, possible birthplace, and eventual settlement in Halifax.

Image:

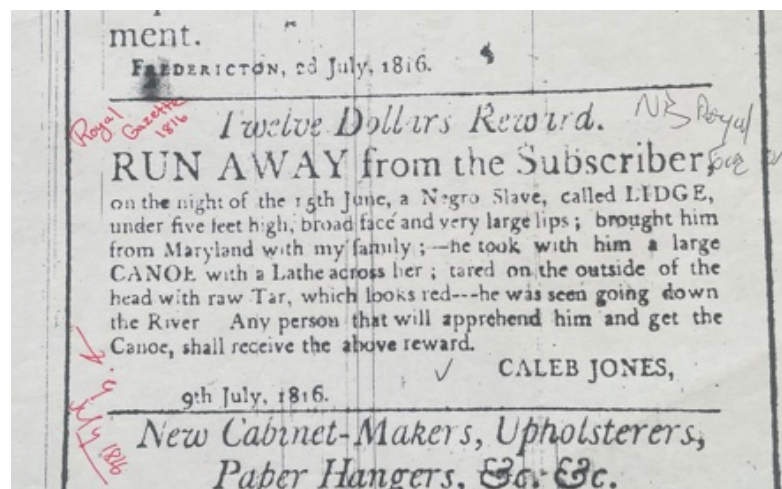


Image caption:

Left: Caleb Jones, "RAN AWAY From the Subscriber," Royal Gazette (New Brunswick), 25 July 1786

Right: Caleb Jones, "Twelve Dollars Reward," Royal Gazette (New Brunswick), 9 July 1816