Title: “He is remarkable for...wearing a Handkerchief tied round his Head”:
Resistance as Escape and Cultural Retention in the Canadian Fugitive Slave Archive

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April 19th 5:00pm Zoom lecture
https://uiowa.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJIvcuyvqDMrGdw-rHOMniQ-ynYsu7NRuR7w
Co-hosted by DEI committee, School of Art & Art History, University of Iowa and Slavery North Initiative, UMass Amherst

Bio:
Charmaine A. Nelson is a Provost Professor of Art History in the Department of History of Art and Architecture and Director of the Slavery North Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. From 2020-2022, she was a Tier I Canada Research Chair in Transatlantic Black Diasporic Art and Community Engagement at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) University in Halifax, CANADA where she founded the first-ever institute focused on the study of Canadian Slavery. She also worked at McGill University (Montreal) for seventeen years (2003-2020). Nelson has made ground-breaking contributions to the fields of the Visual Culture of Slavery, Race and Representation, Black Diaspora Studies, 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). She is actively engaged with lay audiences through her media work including ABC, CBC, CTV, and City TV News, The Boston
Globe, BBC One’s “Fake or Fortune,” and PBS’ “Finding your Roots”. She has blogged for Huffington Post Canada and written for The Walrus. In 2017, she was the William Lyon Mackenzie King Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies at Harvard University and in 2021 a Fields of the Future Fellow at Bard Graduate Center (NYC). In 2022 she was inducted as a Fellow in the Royal Society of Canada and elected as a Member of the American Antiquarian Society.

Abstract:
Scholarship on Transatlantic Slavery has long benefited from the often-exhaustive data published in the fugitive slave archive. Ubiquitous throughout the transatlantic world, fugitive slave advertisements were commonly placed by enslavers seeking to recapture enslaved people who had fled. Such notices commonly provided specific, invasive detail about an enslaved person’s body, dress, skills, languages, and even gestures and mannerisms. Fugitive slave advertisements were complex and contradictory. Such notices were written by white enslavers who documented enslaved flight and sought both to justify slavery and to recapture the enslaved. However, the advertisements also routinely disclosed the bravery, intelligence, and resilience of those who ran away, alongside elements of their cultural practices; their retention of African traditions and their adaptation under the burden of creolization. Drawing from literary, legal, and other examples, this lecture will explore the role of slave dress in the preservation of African culture in the Americas within the domains of slave advertisements and “high” art portraiture.