Monday, 26.02.2024; 4:15 - 6:00 pm CET

Sophie White, University of Notre Dame (USA)

"Voices of the Enslaved: A Digital Humanities Approach to Encountering the Archives in French America"

Abstract:
This paper presents a new digital humanities project stemming from fresh research on the voices of the enslaved in the French Atlantic world and the methodological approaches raised. This digital humanities project and website will go live in April 2024.

French law allowed the enslaved to testify in court in certain circumstances and, as I argued in my book, *Voices of the Enslaved* (winner of the 2020 Frederick Douglass prize for best book on slavery), those who testified could answer expansively and, as they spoke, their words were written down and made a part of the court record. The resulting archive contains autobiographical material that allows us to have access to their voices and thoughts as they expressed them, both at the time of testifying, but also in the way they narrated earlier moments as recounted and characterized by them in court.

Though this corpus of autobiographical narratives is not without significant challenges, it is not one that we can discount given the marginalisation of enslaved people and their presence in the archives. This presentation will allow me to reflect on the methodological challenges and advantages of taking a digital humanities approach to the material. At the same time, I will foreground, the individuals who anchor the project and the themes their testimonies evoke, including, above all, their insistence on having their humanity recognized: Jannot, 1743 (Voudou); Marguerite, 1764 (incarceration); Jeanot, 1764 (fugitivity); Babette, 1765 (childhood).

Bio:
Sophie White is the Joseph and Elizabeth Robbie College Professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame (USA). A historian of slavery, race, and gender in the Atlantic world, White is the recipient of 7 book prizes for her recent book, Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana, including the 2020 American Historical Association Rawley Prize for the best book in Atlantic History, and the 2020 Frederick Douglass Book Prize for the best book on slavery.

Her other publications include a volume on slave testimony co-edited with Trevor Burnard, a monograph on French-Native American relations in Louisiana, as well as over 20 essays and articles, and a forthcoming digital humanities project on the testimony of the enslaved for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.
She is currently Leverhulme Trust Visiting Professor at the University of Leeds to work on her next project on extrajudicial violence against the enslaved, and concurrently recipient of a US National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholar fellowship for her other new project on red hair.