

HISTORY WORKSHOP

The Department of History

Tuesdays ~ 12:30-1:30 pm ~ ZOOM

Dressed in Gingham and Flowered Handkerchiefs, or Writing a Global History of French Caribbean Slave Clothing

Dr. Elizabeth Heath

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12:30-1:30 pm

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In May 1786 four newly enslaved men—Ajax, Vulcain, Cupidon, and Mars—ran away from Sieur Morgand’s plantation in the Anse-à-Veau parish in the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue. The runaway advertisement seeking their return described the four in detail, noting that their clothing was “the uniform...blue painted handkerchiefs with tiny flowers, gingham shirts, trousers of blue and white striped cotton; all four have gingham hats made of poor white canvas.” Why, one might ask, did slave owners purchase blue dyed and printed textiles, including flowered handkerchiefs, to clothe their slaves? This talk will argue that answering this question leads to a global history of the French cotton industry, one that integrates the histories of the Indian Ocean textile trade, the Atlantic Ocean slave trade, and the French sugar colonies into one narrative.

Elizabeth Heath is an associate professor of history at Baruch College-City University of New York whose research focuses on the French empire. She is currently writing a book entitled *Invisible Empires: Colonial Commodities, Capitalism, and the Making of Modern French Self*, which explores the role that colonial territories, producers, and products played in the emergence of distinctive forms of perception and cognition that aided the development of French industrial capitalism between 1750 and 1970.