

The Politics of Wellbeing: Health and Medicine in the Archaeological Past



MEREDITH REIFSCHEIDER

This research explores the impacts of 19th century Danish colonial healthcare policy and practice on enslaved African and African descendent groups in St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. The broader goals of this project are to understand how enslaved individuals developed alternative health-care practices and understandings of health apart from that of the Danish colonial government. This talk will discuss findings from the past three seasons of archaeological fieldwork conducted at Estate Cane Garden, a former sugar plantation dating the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Fieldwork centered on the former plantation hospital building that was used to contain sick and injured enslaved workers. Analysis of artifacts recovered from the hospital indicate that daily care encompassed broader understandings of health and healthcare than we commonly associate with Western medical practice. I argue that enslaved nurses and patients resisted colonial ascriptions of healthcare and the body by drawing on a broad range of resources, including locally provisioned food items and local networks of care. Furthermore, I suggest that archaeology is an invaluable tool for moving beyond presentist and universalist notions of healthcare by interrogating how social groups within various positions of power negotiate their own understandings of health and wellbeing.

THURSDAY
November 17, 2016
12:00 - 12:45 PM
Building 50, 51A