

Tentative Title of Dissertation:

Within the House of Bondage: Constructing and Negotiating the Plantation Landscape in the 18th Century British Atlantic World

Dissertation Abstract:

Between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the emergence of the Georgian worldview transformed the physical, cultural, and social landscapes of the British Atlantic. Historians, architectural historians, and archaeologists have credited the Georgian worldview with imposing order on the New World, but this process was not neat, immediate, or consistent from one place to another. My dissertation uses documentary and material records of plantations in South Carolina, Barbados, and Virginia to challenge histories that suggest uniformity in the acceptance of the Georgian worldview, revealing the messiness of cultural transmission and transformation. The plantation landscape is uniquely suited to such analysis because it is a “Georgian” landscape that never existed in England and could not exist without slavery, providing an opportunity for a focused study of the effects of slavery on the evolution of the Georgian worldview, as well as the limitations of the Georgian worldview as a scholarly approach. Combining social and cultural history with architectural history and historical archaeology, I examine buildings and landscapes that have been ignored or forgotten alongside the best known examples of eighteenth century plantation architecture. I then bring the study of enslaved African Americans into the big house, revealing how that space changed and was changed by their work. I show how the organization of space shaped relationships within the plantation household, a place unlike any manor house in Britain in both its situation and the character of its inhabitants. Ultimately, I compare the three colonies to explore how the Georgian worldview influenced ideas about race, class, and gender, and, in turn, colonial identity.