

Tentative Title of Dissertation:

Archaeological Explorations of the Dynamics of the Illicit Slave Trade in 19th Century Guinea

Abstract:

This dissertation project investigates the social, economic, and environmental changes to the West African cultural landscape brought about through the "illicit" 19th century slave trade and seeks to identify the ramifications of those changes within present-day communities. Through comparisons of archaeological investigations of historic sites in the Rio Pongo region of coastal Guinea, analyses of artifacts and cultural remains recovered will be conducted to increase an understanding of the circumstances of the "illicit" slave trade era. This dissertation research specifically employs archaeological techniques and documentary interpretation to investigate issues of variation in modern local memory of temporally and geographically similar sites of the slave trade in coastal Guinea. As a part of this dissertation research, archaeological excavations are being conducted at the historic village of Gambia, where oral accounts deny an occupation of the village during the "illicit" slave trade period, despite contradictory evidence provided by historical documents and archaeological artifacts. The historical connections of modern occupants of the surrounding village differ quite dramatically from those of three other villages in the region, where stories of occupation during the legal and "illicit" slave trade eras are common knowledge among residents. This dissertation investigates how and why such variation in the production and reproduction of historical memory of the slave trade continues in the region today in an effort to contribute to an increasing discourse of the African Diaspora.