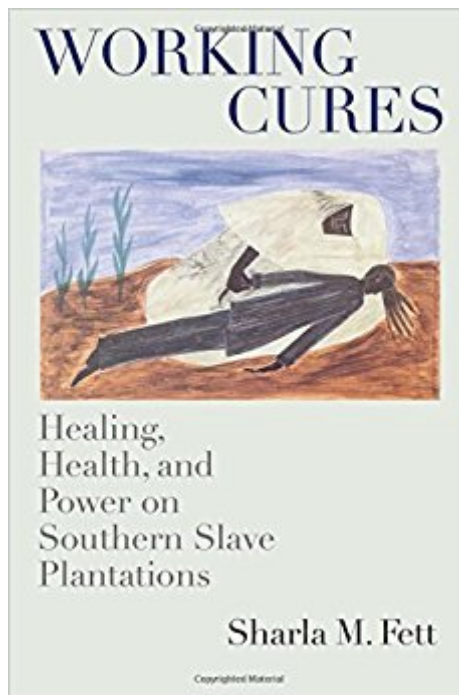




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# **Working Cures: Healing, Health, And Power On Southern Slave Plantations (Gender And American Culture)**



## Synopsis

Exploring the charged topic of black health under slavery, Sharla Fett reveals how herbalism, conjuring, midwifery, and other African American healing practices became arts of resistance in the antebellum South. Fett shows how enslaved men and women drew on African precedents to develop a view of health and healing that was distinctly at odds with slaveholders' property concerns. While white slaveowners narrowly defined slave health in terms of "soundness" for labor, slaves embraced a relational view of health that was intimately tied to religion and community. African American healing practices thus not only restored the body but also provided a formidable weapon against white objectification of black health. Enslaved women played a particularly important role in plantation health culture: they made medicines, cared for the sick, and served as midwives in both black and white households. Their labor as health workers not only proved essential to plantation production but also gave them a basis of authority within enslaved communities. Not surprisingly, conflicts frequently arose between slave doctoring women and the whites who attempted to supervise their work, as did conflicts related to feigned illness, poisoning threats, and African-based religious practices. By examining the deeply contentious dynamics of plantation healing, Fett sheds new light on the broader power relations of antebellum American slavery.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this work, which is based on her 1995 Rutgers University dissertation, Fett assesses slave health

and medical care in the U.S. South. She portrays slave society as a culture that developed its own healing methods while subject to abuse and racist theories from white medical practitioners. Slave healthcare was an amalgam of various African tribal traditions transmuted by their dispersal throughout the South. Important to these systems were such factors as kinship relations in the community and the role of slave women in healing practices. White medical care of slaves concentrated on their fitness for labor in the household or fields. Written in a lively and engaging style, this book is a unique overview of the complex interaction of white and slave medical care in the antebellum South. Fett, who is currently a visiting scholar at the University of California, Los Angeles, also provides an important background to African American health since the end of slavery. Recommended for academic and large public libraries. A.J. Wright, Univ. of Alabama Lib., Birmingham Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Written in a lively and engaging style, this book is a unique overview of the complex interaction of white and slave medical care in the antebellum South. ("Library Journal")Digs into an area of slave health untouched by previous historians. (Todd L. Savitt, author of "Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia")Reveals how African Americans developed a distinctive health culture that drew on a panoply of therapies, remedies, and botanical knowledge from African, European, and Native American sources. (Tera W. Hunter, author of "To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War")"Incorporates and contributes to a wide range of existing scholarship on the history of medicine, the Atlantic world, and the religious, cultural, and social dimensions of the African American slave community." -- "Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science"

Fett's work is clearly deeply rooted in the archives as she gives us a nuanced depiction of health and well being on 19th century plantations in the VA tidewater and SC low country. While health and well being were clearly a means to an economic end for the slave holder, Fett also shows how healing, as a form of African cultural retention, was a means of resistance and community building for the enslaved. This work should not be overlooked in the study of slavery in the American South as it is a wonderful study of power and cultural developmeny on the plantation.

So many people attribute African American healing to other cultures, particularly European Americans or Native Americans. While there were bound to be cultural sharing, Professor Sharla Fett makes it perfectly clear that enslaved Africans brought their own wisdom with them concerning

farming and healing, as well as certain medicinal plants, with them to the Americas during the Middle Passage. "Working Cures" is an outstanding contribution to understanding distinctly American contributions to healing made by African Americans. Fett also presents the history of conjure, root doctoring, midwifery and a great deal more as it relates to medicine and healing in the African American community. Fett also illustrates the mind/body/spirit, holistic approach of African healing employed by African Americans. "Working Cures" is essential reading for those interested in learning the unique aspects of African American healing in the United States.

One of the few books of its kind

Fett presented the dynamics of plantation health and medicine well in this book. She showed how enslaved men and women used their own developed health practices as a form of power and resistance during slavery, denying their labeling as purely property while also holding on to some of their African culture. I appreciate this text, but I enjoyed more a similar text by Marie Jenkins Schwartz, entitled *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the antebellum South*. Schwartz touched on many of the same points, but focused more on power dynamics between physician, master and bondsmen and included so many more stories that are easier to read than loaded text. Fett authored a good and informative book, just wasn't the most enjoyable for me to read.

Excellent information about healing, herbs, and African American midwives in the antebellum period. Highly recommended for readers interested in health, birthing, and midwives in the African American community during that time. Unexpectedly, also great art!

Too pedantic. No specific recipes and very little on the use of hoodoo

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