

Kingsley Plantation

**EthnoHistorical Study of the
Kingsley Plantation Community**

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(Final)

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On the cover:

Front Cover—Kingsley Plantation Site, 2001 (top middle); Kingsley Plantation view from the St. Johns River (bottom left); Anna Kingsley Kitchen house (bottom middle); the barn (bottom right);

Back Cover—Anna Kingsley Kitchen House, 2001 (foreground top middle); Kingsley Plantation ‘slave’ cabin, circa 1950’s (top left); Kingsley Plantation ‘slave’ cabin, circa 1900 (top right); Kingsley Plantation view from the St. Johns River (bottom middle)

Cover designed by Yolanda N. Jackson of Nevada Graphics, Baton Rouge, LA. Slave cabin photos courtesy of Florida State Archives Photographic Collection, Tallahassee, FL.

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Figure 2.1, “Zephaniah Kingsley family Global Perspective Map”, courtesy of Terry Weik (University of South Carolina).

Figure 3.1, “Kingsley Descent Chart”, graphics courtesy of Yolanda N. Jackson (Nevada Graphics).

Figure 3.2, “Kingsley Plantation Extended Community Chart”, design and graphics courtesy of Yolanda N. Jackson (Nevada Graphics); photographs of Clara and Eartha White, Albert Sammis, Jr., and The Afro American Life Insurance Company, courtesy of University of North Florida Library, Eartha M.M. White Collection.

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Forward

When 19th century ended, Jacksonville, Florida, was transformed from a sparsely populated seacoast town into a city. That transformation was made by families that had been enslaved, families that held slaves, and free people whose lives created a new city on Florida's "First Coast." Jacksonville today is a city with a rich tapestry of industry, tourism, service, and a naval installation as large as any in the United States. The transformation of the mouth of the St. Johns River and the marshlands of the sea islands of Georgia and Florida to a thriving metropolis is clearly seen in this study of the Kingsley Plantation. The Kingsley Plantation is important as a place where people lived and worked in Florida, as well as a place in Florida's history. As this report illustrates, the plantation alternated between Tumucua, Spanish, and later English control and was purchased in 1817 by Englishman, Zephaniah Kingsley. The human landscape of the plantation on Fort George Island is an especially important feature of Jacksonville as it changed from a small town of less than a thousand people to a major industrial port. That history and the living history of contemporary conversations, narratives, and reflections is the theme of this report by Antoinette Jackson, the principle author of this report and myself. Antoinette Jackson brings to this study the theoretical concepts developed in African Diaspora studies. She shows the interplay of enslaved and free people's lives throughout the history of the plantation and well into the 20th century. Rather than thinking of the plantation as a total institution that controlled all of the lives of people associated with it, Jackson takes a wider look at the community of people, African enslaved workers, free Africans and African Americans, Non-African Americans and how the larger community gave meaning to the plantation itself.

The community of the Kingsley plantation is a stark and haunting story of the African Diaspora. Jackson points out that Kingsley was someone who was quite proud about his occupation as a slave trader and spoke quite directly about it even to anti-slavery interviewers in the 1840s. He was a person of complex paradoxes. While he was English, he also swore allegiance to South Carolina, Denmark, and Spain throughout his life. He was a slave owner who married Anta Majigeen Ndiaye, a woman from a Senegalese royal family. Kingsley purchased her in Cuba and brought to Florida where both of them lived on the Kingsley Plantation. In 1837 Anta and Zephaniah Kingsley left Florida and settled in Haiti. Their descendants are multi racial and multi national, spreading throughout the United States through the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

The Kingsley plantation is today a National Park, a protected and celebrated place on the outskirts of the industrial Jacksonville north of the downtown. Huge naval ships slide out to the ocean from the nearby base, barges, container ships, and a few fishing boats ply the waters nearby. Kingsley plantation seems like an island in the midst of this world of noise, a sea filled with churning water and pollution, and industrial might. A few people local to the area still fish off of the bridges that span the St. Johns river estuary and the rich, low land that was the key resource for the plantation. It is hard to imagine what the plantation was like when it was more central to the life and economy of Jacksonville. The lifeways of people around and in the plantation was a combination of working the water and the land. I have interviewed people in Gainesville, Florida, who grew up in the area. Their memories are of their grandparents catching shrimp, working plots of land, and trying to see how the impending urbanism of the 20th century could provide them with benefits that the 19th century did not have. Close to Kingsley

plantation is American Beach, a thriving core of African American life for North Florida that independent film maker John Sayles portrayed in his quasi-documentary film Sunshine State (2002).

The Kingsley plantation forces us to rethink common images of plantations. The location, on the marshlands marked today by Jacksonville’s busy port activities, is strikingly different than the plantations of popular books and media. Rice, cotton, and indigo were the early crops raised there, crops that owed their harvest success to the agricultural skills of Africans who worked on the land. Later cotton and sugar cane were harvested there, and by the 1920’s the Plantation and surrounding land produced Florida oranges that were shipped out on the new railroad that later became known as the “Orange Blossom Special.” The plantation challenges other stereotypes as well. Zephaniah Kingsley and his Senegalese wife Anta owned slaves, and their descendants and the descendants of the enslaved people on the plantation intermixed within the evolving Jacksonville of the 20th century.

The University of Florida anthropology department is honored to have been part of the recent story of Kingsley Plantation. In 1968 the distinguished archaeologist, Dr. Charles Fairbanks made archaeological news when he excavated the slave quarters at Kingsley Plantation. Excavating outside of the “big houses” of plantations had simply not been done prior to Fairbanks’ work, and what he found in his excavations changed our view of the history of the 19th century. Fairbanks found the enslaved people supplemented their rations with many different kinds of animals and seafood, and even evidently had guns to hunt with. Fairbanks’ students, including Distinguished Curator of the Florida Museum of Natural History, Dr. Kathleen Deagan, learned from these

excavations and then went on to excavate Fort Mose, the first African American fort in St. Augustine, as well as the colonial city of St. Augustine itself. In 1998 the Department of Anthropology again had an opportunity to learn from the lives of descendants of the Kingsley plantation when Dr. Anthony Paredes of the National Park Service developed a contract with the Department in order to videotape oral histories at the first Kingsley Heritage Day. These tapes are remarkable for the insights that people today have of the complex social and cultural history of Jacksonville and the Kingsley Plantation's place in that history.

Antoinette Jackson and the colleagues who helped with the fieldwork for the project, Dr. Terry Weik and Ms. Katisha Greer, bring new light to the history of Jacksonville, the history of the plantation, and the African Diaspora. Antoinette and her colleagues are part of the African Diaspora themselves. Their perspectives both as participants in this historical process and as anthropologists trained in careful scientific research make this a much-needed document. Antoinette has brought enthusiasm and warmth to this ethnohistory, all the while keeping a critical and theoretically insightful point of view. Thanks to Antoinette for combining the study of kinship, place, and Diaspora through the lens of the Kingsley Plantation.

Allan F. Burns

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INTRODUCTION

The history of the Kingsley Plantation is an interesting and complex combination of people, personalities, and agendas. Zephaniah Kingsley, Jr.’s life and business activities, for example, underscore the reality of the transatlantic slave trade in Florida. His multi racial and multi national family and their connections, associations, and relationships with people and communities on local and global levels provide important insight into issues of race, power, and place.

The goal of this ethnohistorical study of the Kingsley Plantation community, “The Legacy of Slavery at the Kingsley Plantation”, is to expand the scope of knowledge about the lifeways and socio-cultural patterns of persons primarily of African descent associated with the Kingsley Plantation. The study is especially enriched by oral history and interview testimony provided by Zephaniah Kingsley’s African, European, and Latino descendant family members and descendants of enslaved and free persons of color who worked at the Kingsley Plantation site. Emphasis is placed on analysis of the Kingsley community’s transition through time, from the antebellum period to the present—with a focus on the period immediately before Civil War and through the early 20th century.

Research was primarily conducted in the greater Jacksonville, Florida area. In addition, Amelia Island and St. Augustine, Florida served as key research sites. Archaeological findings, land grants, and war claim information are used to show the Kingsley’s historical connection to northeast Florida. Probate records, U.S. Federal Census data (1850-1940), maps, photographs, and other archival materials are used to profile the connection between the Kingsley Plantation and

the greater Jacksonville community and show the importance of the Kingsley Plantation community to Jacksonville’s transition to industrial and post-industrial development.

The reality of race and racial policies in Florida is captured in this report by chronicling the lives of Kingsley Plantation Community descendants via oral history narratives and U.S. census records and reports. The subjective and variable nature of racial classification practices, for example, is captured in the instructions given to U.S. census enumerators at the turn of the century. At the census of 1910 enumerators were instructed to:

... indicate the color or race of each person enumerated, distinguishing blacks and mulattoes in the Negro population in accordance with the definition following:

“For census purposes the term ‘black’ includes all persons who are evidently full-blooded Negroes, while the term ‘mulatto’ includes all other persons having some proportion or perceptible trace of Negro blood”. [U.S. Bureau of Census 1918:207]

The lives of Kingsley Plantation descendants and residents of Jacksonville and surrounding cities associated with the plantation reflect the impact of racial politics on community organization and relationships.

This study is anchored by two time periods. On one end is Zephaniah Kingsley’s arrival in Florida (around 1803) through his purchase of various plantation sites, including what is now the Kingsley Plantation site. On the other end, is the present where oral history and interview testimony conveyed by descendants and local area residents help to frame the plantation community beyond a geographic and physical place perspective. As a result it will be seen how social relationships and interactions are integral components in the shaping

of ‘place’ (my place/your place) and in turn how relations to ‘place’ are influenced by or influence how the past is viewed, understood, and experienced.

Methodology—collecting and organizing the data.

Places capture the complex emotional, behavioral, and moral relationships between people and their territory. They represent people, their actions, and their interactions and as such become malleable memorials for negotiating and renegotiating human relationships. [Kahn 1996:168]

In this report both an ethnohistorical and an ethnographic research methodology are utilized. The ethnohistorical methodology incorporates anthropology’s use of theory as a framework for organizing data and formulating analysis and the historic method for collecting, verifying, and organizing relevant material. The ethnographic methodology involves the direct collection of data from the field via observation or interactive participation with the subject(s) under analysis.

The concept of ‘space’ and how it is experienced will be used as a framework for organizing data and formulating analysis of the Kingsley Plantation community. Most recently, Miriam Kahn’s work on Tahiti (Kahn 2000) underscores the importance of incorporating expanded notions of space in anthropological applications. She describes place as a dynamic entity with many aspects, all of which must be analyzed and understood in order for a comprehensive representation of a chosen site or community (in her case present day Tahiti) to be developed. Therefore, place viewed as an interactive experiencing of space, is part of every segment of community life both physical and social.

In the case of the Kingsley Plantation community for example, the National Park Service sponsored “Kingsley Plantation Annual Heritage Festival” can be viewed as a mediating space (a non-threatening social space or ‘safe’ house) for members of the Kingsley family and others to share memories about or reconcile relationships with the plantation’s past. And, it is the combination of the plantation as a physical place in the form of tangible and interactively accessible reminders (i.e., grave sites, housing remains, waterways) and a socially constructed space that help keep it in the minds and memory of those who visit. Therefore looking at the concept of space from different perspectives is one way to derive an expanded understanding of the Kingsley Plantation community.

Participant observation and key informant interviews for the purpose of collecting oral history were the primary means of obtaining ethnographic field data about the Kingsley Plantation community. Interviews were conducted primarily with persons of African descent— ranging in ages from 20 to 86 years old. Research was conducted at the Kingsley Plantation site and throughout the greater Jacksonville, Florida area, as well as in the communities of Lincolnville in St. Augustine and American Beach on Amelia Island.

Institutions dedicated primarily to serving patrons of African descent contain invaluable information on the history of African people, often on community specific levels. In Jacksonville, the following sources were consulted regarding the history of the local black community for this project: Bethel Baptist Institutional Church, Historic Mount Zion AME Church, LaVilla Museum, Clara White Mission and Eartha M.M.

White Historical Museum and Mission, the Durkeville Historical Society, and private collections maintained by families in the community. In addition to community specific resources, archival data on the history of Africans in Florida was found in the following collections: the Black Archives Research Center and Museum at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida, the Library of Congress Memory Collection website, and the Eartha M.M. White Collection at the University of North Florida (see Note 2 for a detailed listing of sources consulted).

Report Layout.

This study of the Kingsley Plantation community raises and addresses several important questions: (a) How and to what degree have obstacles to free movement within local community spaces been dictated by slavery, racism, and the plantation experience in America? (b) How have Africans in America and their descendants strategically managed the transition from conditions imposed by the system of chattel slavery as practiced in the U.S. South and its legacy to life beyond? and, (c) How has life, as experienced by Kingsley Plantation community descendants today been influenced by the plantation experience and memories of the past?

The report will be presented five parts plus a conclusion: (1) The Kingsley Plantation Today— a physical (and social) reminder; (2) Zephaniah Kingsley and the Kingsley Plantation in Global Perspective; (3) The Kingsley Family in Florida Before the Civil War and into the Present; (4) Transition, movement, and memory: The Kingsley Plantation Community and Jacksonville’s Growth and Development; and (5) Ethnographic Profiles of a Historic Resource Site—The Kingsley Plantation. The report begins with a presentation of the Kingsley Plantation place—the big house, the kitchen

house and tabby slave quarters— intertwined with discussions and descriptions of the 1998 National Park Service sponsored ‘Kingsley Plantation Heritage Festival’. The festival event and the Kingsley Plantation site provide a platform and a forum from which family and community relationships with the plantation’s legacy can be explored.

Chapter Two places the Kingsley Plantation within a historical context, using Zephaniah Kingsley’s life as a focal point for analyzing the diaspora experiences of Africans in Florida. An overview of Zephaniah Kingsley’s life is provided starting with his arrival in East Florida in 1803 until his death in 1843. Chapter Three provides as an overview of Zephaniah Kingsley’s family relationships and associations. Descendant charts for Kingsley-Gibbs, Kingsley-McNeill, Kingsley-LeBron; Kingsley-Eliebo, Kingsley-Sammis and Kingsley-Baxter family lines are included. In addition, an ethnographic profile of the Kingsley-Sammis-Lewis-Betsch family is featured. The primary focus of Chapter Four is transition, with a specific focus on the Kingsley Plantation community within the context of the greater Jacksonville, Florida community’s transition from slavery to segregation to Civil Rights and from an agrarian based economy to an industrial/post industrial centered economy. An ethnographic profile of the Bartley-King-Murrell-Williams family is highlighted. In Chapter Five, the Kingsley Plantation site is looked at from the plantation era and recreation and development era of its history using ethnographic profiles of the Christopher family and the Daniels family to frame the story. The report is concluded in Chapter 6 with a summation of the goals of the study and an overview of what was accomplished. Throughout the report, emphasis is placed on the plantation as a social space and the Kingsley Plantation community’s connection to and interrelationship with the Jacksonville community as a whole.

Kingsley Plantation Extended Community



Kingsley Plantation Extended Community map. [The Afro-American Life Insurance Co. (the company's founder married a Kingsley descendent), Clara and Eartha White (Jacksonville philanthropists that once lived and worked on Kingsley Plantation), and Albert Sammis, Jr. (grandson of a Kingsley in-law) photos courtesy of the University of North Florida, Special Collections]