

KINGSLEY PLANTATION

Department of the Interior
National Park Service



Timucuan Preserve

FREEDOM AND SLAVERY IN PLANTATION-ERA FLORIDA

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many people came to Florida. Some, like Zephaniah Kingsley, sought to make their fortunes by obtaining land and establishing plantations. Others were forced to come to Florida to work on those plantations, their labor providing wealth to the people who owned them. Some of the enslaved would later become free landowners, struggling to keep their footing in a dangerous time of shifting alliances and politics. All of these people played a part in the history of Kingsley Plantation.

The Kingsley Family

In 1814, Zephaniah Kingsley moved to Fort George Island and established a plantation. He brought a wife and three children (a fourth would be born at this plantation). His wife, Anna Madgigine Jai, was from Senegal, Africa, and was purchased by Kingsley as a slave. She actively participated in plantation management, acquiring her own land and slaves when freed by Kingsley in 1811.

With an enslaved work force of about 60, the Fort George plantation produced Sea Island cotton, citrus, sugar cane, and corn. Kingsley continued to acquire property in northeast Florida and eventually possessed more than 32,000 acres, including four



Plantation House, post-Civil War era

major plantation complexes and more than 200 slaves.

Changing Times

The United States acquired Florida from Spain in 1821. Radical political, economic, and social reforms swept in along with the new government. The Spanish had relatively liberal policies regarding issues of race, but American territorial law brought many changes. At a time when many slaveholders feared slave rebellions, oppressive laws were enacted and conditions for Florida's black population, free and enslaved, deteriorated.

Kingsley was against the restrictive laws, arguing the importance of free blacks in society. He advocated Spain's three class system, where enslaved people existed at the bottom tier, free blacks the middle, and



*Kingsley Plantation Slave Quarters,
post-Civil War era*

white people as the top class. His pleas were ignored, and over the next two decades, laws were enacted that severely restricted the civil liberties of free blacks.

Despite the danger of being ostracized, Kingsley crusaded to alter the views of southern law makers. He wrote a series of editorials, speeches, and addresses, which became public and widely circulated. He became best known for a series of Treatises published in four editions between 1828 and 1834. His words were read throughout the North and the South. Kingsley's writings warned of the dangers of a society based on racial prejudice, but, at the same time, advocated the continuance of slavery.

Frustrated that his words were falling on deaf ears, and to escape what he called a "spirit of intolerant prejudice," Kingsley moved his family to Haiti, the only free black republic in the hemisphere, in 1837. There, Kingsley established a colony for his family and some of his former slaves.

In 1839, Fort George Island was sold to his nephew Kingsley Beatty Gibbs. Zephaniah Kingsley continued to own slaves until his death in 1843.

"Few, I think will deny that color and condition, if properly considered, are two very separate qualities... our legislators... have mistaken the shadow for the substance, and confounded together two very different things; thereby substantiating by law a dangerous and inconvenient antipathy, which can have no better foundation than prejudice."

Zephaniah Kingsley, *A Treatise on...Slavery*, 1829



The Slave Community

A fifth of a mile from the plantation home of Zephaniah Kingsley are the remains of 25 tabby cabins. Arranged in a semicircle, there were 32 cabins, 16 on either side of the road.

This area represents the slave community, homes of the men, women, and children who lived and worked on Kingsley Plantation more than 170 years ago.

Slave labor on this Sea Island cotton plantation was performed according to the "task system." Under this system, each slave was assigned a specified amount of work for the day and upon completion of this task, the slave was permitted to use the balance of the day as he or she chose.

Under the task system, it was assumed that slaves would raise a variety of crops in their own gardens. These products could supplement the slaves' plantation rations, or be traded or sold through the plantation owner.

Slave Daily Life

Most aspects of slave family life were influenced by the needs and attitudes of the plantation owner. Legally, slave marriages were not recognized; the law dealt more with the issues of ownership. Children of enslaved parents belonged to the mother's owner. Financial difficulties or death of the owner could prompt sales of slaves, separating families.

Medical attention for slaves varied from home remedies to physicians hired by the plantation owner – and could depend on the economic impact of the disability.

Tasks often brought slaves into close contact with their owners. One example is a slave's task to care for the owner's child on a daily basis, spending more of the day with that child than her own.

Some aspects of slave life were not controlled by the plantation owner. Within their community, slaves created a culture that included elements of their African heritage. Slaves expressed themselves in music, dance, and religious practices that were their own and did not reflect the customs of their owners. Frequently these expressions were hidden, as in lyrics with



Unidentified slave woman and George Gibbs

double meanings and secret religious services.

Many aspects of American culture are directly linked to the plantation period. From southern cooking to popular music, aspects of African culture survived slavery and are present today.

Visiting Kingsley Plantation

Kingsley Plantation is a 60-acre unit of the 46,000-acre Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve in Jacksonville, Florida, which is managed by the National Park Service.

Visitors can explore the grounds, which include the oldest standing plantation house in Florida, the kitchen, barn, and waterfront. The still-standing remains of 25 slave cabins offer perhaps the most graphic evidence of slave living quarters and daily life experiences in the state.

Kingsley Plantation is open seven days a week, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Years Day. Admission is free.

The plantation is located off of Heckscher Drive/A1A north of the St. Johns River ferry landing.

For more information, contact:

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