



Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner

Daniel L Schafer

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Anna Kingsley's life story adds a dramatic chapter to histories of the South, the state of Florida, and the African diaspora. Working from surprisingly extensive records, including information and photographs from extended-family members and descendants, Daniel Shafer reconstructs and documents one slave's remarkable story.

Both an American slave and a slaveowner--and possibly an African princess--Anna was a teenager when she was captured in her homeland of Senegal in 1806 and sold into slavery. Zephaniah Kingsley, Jr., a planter and slave trader from Spanish East Florida, bought her in Havana, Cuba, and took her to his St. Johns River plantation in northeast Florida, where she soon became his household manager, his wife, and eventually the mother of four of his children. Her husband formally emancipated her in 1811, and she became the owner of her own farm and twelve slaves the following year.

For 25 years, life on her farm and at the Kingsley plantation on Fort George Island was relatively tranquil. But when Florida passed from Spanish to American control, and racism and discrimination increased in the American territories, Anna Kingsley and her children migrated to a colony in Haiti established by her husband as a refuge for free blacks. Amid the spiraling racial tensions of the antebellum period, Anna returned to north Florida, where she bought and sold land, sued white people in the courts, and became a central figure in a free black community. Such accomplishments by a woman in a patriarchal society are fascinating in themselves. To have achieved them as a woman of color is remarkable.

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