
Kingsley, Anna Jai Magigdine

(1793–c. 1870),

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former slave who became a major slave owner in both Florida and Haiti during the early 1800s, was born sometime in 1793 at a tribal village in Senegal. Details surrounding the circumstances of Kingsley's birth are vague. Born Anta Majigeen Ndiaye, Kingsley grew up among the tribal nobility of the Jolof (or Wolof) Empire until the age of thirteen. Claims made in her later life that she had been an African princess seem to stem from the fact that her father made an unsuccessful bid for the tribal kingship sometime during Kingsley's childhood.

In the fall of 1806 Kingsley arrived in the slave market at Havana in Cuba. She became a slave, having been either captured by slave traders during a raid against her village or sold into slavery by her family earlier that year. A prominent slave trader and plantation owner from the United States, Zephaniah Kingsley Jr., purchased Kingsley between 18 September 1806 and 10 October 1806. The Kingsleys then traveled from Cuba to Florida aboard the *Esther* and arrived at Kingsley's Laurel Grove Plantation, located just outside of Jacksonville, Florida, in November 1806. At the time of her arrival in Florida, Kingsley had already become pregnant with her first child, a boy whom she would name George. Over the next forty years Zephaniah Kingsley Jr. acknowledged Kingsley as his chief wife, although he kept other slave wives and mistresses who also bore him children. Between 1806 and 1811 Kingsley bore two other children, daughters Martha in 1809 and Mary in 1811. On 4 March 1811 Zephaniah Kingsley Jr. emancipated Kingsley and her three children by him. She remained at the Laurel Grove Plantation for another year, managing the household and plantation in her husband's absence.

In 1812 Kingsley applied to the Spanish government for land to hold in her own name while she lived in Florida. The Spanish government granted her request, and Kingsley received five acres of land on the eastern side of the St. John's River, directly across from her husband's plantation at Laurel Grove. Kingsley moved to the new homestead as soon as a two-story building could be erected, similar in architectural design to the plantation house at Laurel Grove. During this period, Kingsley converted to Roman Catholicism, no doubt in order to take advantage of Spanish laws that gave a free black woman such as herself more rights and greater legal protection. While in residence at her homestead, known as Horse Landing, Kingsley acquired twelve slaves of her own. In late 1813 Kingsley feared recapture from American slave owners who raided Florida holdings looking for new slaves during the War of 1812. After the Spanish government successfully fought back against the American invaders, Kingsley moved with her children and slaves to a new plantation on Fort George Island in March 1814. Between 1814 and 1838 Kingsley lived in the "Ma'am Anna House" with her family. On 22 November 1824 Kingsley gave birth to her last child, a boy named John Maxwell Kingsley. During her tenure at the Kingsley plantation on Fort George Island, Kingsley purchased several additional slaves and grew a number of crops quite successfully, including Sea Island cotton.

The transfer of Florida from Spain to the United States culminated in new American laws being enacted in the territory that left very little legal freedoms for men and women of African descent whom the Spanish legal system considered free. As a result Kingsley and her family decided to leave their holdings in Florida for Haiti. In 1838 Kingsley traveled with her husband and children to Cabaret Harbor in Haiti where she continued to manage her family's many properties and agricultural pursuits. On 13 September 1843 Kingsley's husband died. Over the next several years, Kingsley witnessed a protracted legal battle over the contestation of her husband's will by several of his white family members who wished to challenge substantial bequests of property made by Zephaniah Kingsley Jr. to his black wife and mistresses as well as his mulatto children. Three years later Kingsley decided to leave the family's home in Haiti and returned to Florida. The drawn-out legal contest over the legality of her husband's will eventually culminated in its affirmation in 1846 by the Florida Supreme Court. Subsequently Kingsley worked to maintain the family's business interests and assets for many years in Florida and the rest of the United States.

In January 1847 Kingsley purchased a twenty-two-acre farm on the St. John's River just outside of Jacksonville known as Chesterfield. Between 1847 and 1862 Kingsley lived in what became known as the free black community of Arlington. With the outbreak of the Civil War Kingsley and her family had to evacuate to the Union-held town at Fernandina on Amelia Island. The war wiped out the remaining financial holdings of Kingsley and her family. After the war ended in April 1865, Kingsley returned to Jacksonville to live with her daughter until her death sometime during the summer of 1870. She was probably interred in the family cemetery of her daughter Mary Kingsley Sammis. The family burial ground, later known as Clifton Cemetery, houses several unmarked burials including that of Anna Magigine Jai Kingsley, one of the most well-known former slaves and slave owners in Florida history.

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