



Kingsley Heritage Celebration 2009



February events at the Timucuan Preserve held in honor of Black History Month

Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole, former President of Spelman and Bennett Colleges, and descendant of Anna and Zephaniah Kingsley, presented the keynote speech at the 11th Annual Kingsley Heritage Celebration. Held at the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve's Kingsley Plantation site on Saturday, February 21, 2009 at 2:00 p.m., the event also featured a musical presentation by the Edward Waters College Choir, a historically Black college in Jacksonville, Florida.

Dr. Cole's presentation was entitled "Sankofa: Looking Back to Go Forward." An anthropologist by training, Dr. Cole used the concept of sankofa during her speech. Sankofa is a Adinkra symbol of the Ga speaking people of Ghana, in West Africa. The word is tied to the idea that we need to know our past in order to move forward and understand who we are as a culture today.

Throughout her speech, Dr. Cole referred to her ancestors and how events in their lives shaped her life and work today. Dr. Cole is a descendant of Anta Madgigine Jai, a

Senegalese woman purchased by Zephaniah Kingsley in Havana, Cuba in 1806. He wrote that they were married according to her customs in a foreign land. Anna Kingsley, as she became known, was freed by Kingsley and became a land owner, businesswoman, and slave owner. Dr. Cole's lineage also connects her to Abraham Lincoln Lewis, who married Mary Sammis, a descendant of Anna Kingsley. Lewis was Jacksonville's first Black millionaire, and co-founded the Afro American Life Insurance Company, the first insurance company in the state of Florida.

Johnnetta B. Cole will assume the role of Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art on March 2, 2009. Cole has served on the Scholarly Advisory Board of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture since its inception, and has worked with a number of Smithsonian programs since the mid-1980s.

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Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole gave the keynote address at the Kingsley Heritage Celebration.

At top: The choir from Edwater Waters College, the historically Black college in Jacksonville, Florida.

Photographs above: NPS/Paul Haftel

The Culture of the Sea Islands and the Legacy of Slavery

The Kingsley Heritage Celebration recognizes the rich culture that evolved amongst slave communities despite the severe oppression of slavery and celebrates the determination and strength of those men, women, and children. These events also examine cultural aspects of modern American society that originated in the plantation period.

This year's event brought individuals and families, after school programs and church groups, and National Park Service dignitaries and partners to Kingsley Plantation. Special guests included Regional Director David Vela and commissioners from the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.

Activities for February 2009 included storytelling and workshops with Xhabbo, an African American griot from St. Augustine, Florida. His story of Anna Kingsley highlighted the complex life of a young woman from Senegal, who survived the Middle Passage and was purchased by the man who would become her husband. He told the story of her life as a free African woman in Spanish Florida during a time of change in Florida.

The musical legacy that came out of the horrors of slavery was the focus of "The Art of Music: The Roots of Gospel." Florida-based choirs performed music under a large tent on the plantation grounds.

Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole's speech highlighted the power of perseverance and the ways in which our history shapes our lives as private individuals, citizens in a democracy, and family members.

The final Saturday event focuses on recent archaeological work at the slave quarters. Park visitors learn about discoveries at Kingsley Plantation that provide clues about how slaves maintained African identity and culture.

Kingsley Plantation is a unit of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. Today, the public can visit the grounds, which include the oldest standing plantation house in Florida, the kitchen, barn, slave quarters and waterfront. The annual event is free and open to the public, co-sponsored by the Florida Humanities Council.



Commissioners of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, which spans from Florida to North Carolina, listened as Dr. Cole inspired the audience with her words.
- NPS/Katy Ruder

Events each
Saturday Afternoon
in February 2009



With the slave quarters as a backdrop, Xhabbo, an African American griot, told the story of Anta Madgigne Jai Kingsley.
- NPS/Katy Ruder



Children participated in Xhabbo's percussion workshop on February 7, 2009.
- NPS/Katy Ruder



The Living Truth Ministries Choir from Daytona Beach, Florida, mixed gospel and storytelling on February 14, 2009.
- NPS/ Sarah Ackerman