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*The Odyssey of an African Slave* by Sitiki edited by Patricia C. Griffin

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*The Odyssey of an African Slave*. By Sitiki. Edited by Patricia C. Griffin. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. xii, 211 pp. Preface, introduction, B&W photographs, illustrations, maps, epilogue, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$24.95, cloth)

*The Odyssey of an African Slave* is an autobiography, told in the former slave's own words, that covers the approximate time period 1790-1882 and survives as the result of the extensive scholarship of the editor, anthropologist Patricia Griffin. Its historical interest alone makes Sitiki's *Odyssey* a treasure, but this firsthand account also reads like a novel in its own right. There is much more between the covers of this book, however, than Sitiki's dramatic account of his own life story.

Sitiki narrated the remarkable description of his extraordinary and long life to his former "owner" (Buckingham Smith) between 1869 and 1871. That makes the original document nearly 140 years old. The account traces his life as a free child living with his family in an African village, his capture in the interior of Africa by other Africans, the intriguing relationships between the slave traders and slave masters, and then Sitiki's "adventure" as a slave traveling across Africa to the Atlantic seacoast. His narrative further recounts his travel across the ocean to the New World as a slave cabin boy, his experiences in New England, and eventually his life as an adult in the St. Augustine, Florida, area. The dictated account of "Uncle Jack," as Sitiki came to be known, concludes with a discussion of his life as a freedman after the Civil War and then as the first Methodist minister in St. Augustine.

More than twenty years ago, an acquaintance of Patricia Griffin tracked down a copy of the handwritten manuscript to the New-York Historical Society. A second version of the manuscript was subsequently discovered along with notes and fragments of a third copy. Ever since then, Griffin has been researching, documenting, and correlating the observations in the narrative to the history of the period and Sitiki's geographic settings in both Africa and America. As Sitiki describes the architecture and social life of his surroundings, Griffin explores and evaluates the actual archaeological and historic evidence to collaborate and verify his story.

In the first half of *Odyssey*, Sitiki's two autobiographical narrative manuscript versions are correlated by the editor and then synthesized with the fragments and remains of the third version. Griffin then brings Sitiki's vibrant story to life. Occasionally, she makes an editorial note relevant to the manuscript, explaining, for example, why certain wording is likely to be the transcriber's and not Sitiki's, especially if the versions differ.

The second half of *Odyssey* is another, relatively separate work of scholarship. Griffin goes back to the beginning of Sitiki's account and breaks down all of the elements of his story. She analyzes the African words and customs he recalls as a boy and then attempts to match Sitiki's remembrances to what she can determine to be his actual African language, his religion, and possible native country at the time of his capture. She goes through the same meticulous research with all other aspects of Sitiki's recollections, including the architecture and location of the buildings

he describes, the military equipment he visualizes, the industry and machinery in his surroundings, and the clothing styles and food preparation that he recalls. Additionally, she analyzes the traditions and the way of life that Sitiki describes in his firsthand account, especially around the St. Augustine area.

This book is highly recommended for anyone who dares venture into the experiences of a young child captured and forced into the barbaric world of human bondage. This recounting of his “adventures” spans nearly one hundred eventful years across two continents. First-person slave accounts are extremely rare, especially narratives from Florida, thus making *Odyssey* historically relevant as well. The book is also recommended for individuals who want to learn more details about the early setting, history, customs, and architecture of St. Augustine, “America’s Oldest City.”

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*Thunder on the River: The Civil War in Northeast Florida.* By Daniel L. Schafer (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010. xi, 348 pp. Preface, maps, photographs, illustrations, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95, cloth)

Readers of Florida history over the past generation or so have become familiar with the scholarly inquiries of the University of North Florida historian Daniel L. Schafer. Although his studies have extended to a variety of times and subjects within the general context of northeast Florida’s experience, many would point to his innovative – not to say pathfinding – works on race relations, slavery, and African American heritage as holding special interest. Schafer’s commitments to these subjects and to creative, in-depth research perhaps found their greatest expressions in his *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner* (2003).

Two decades prior to the publication of Anna Kingsley’s biography, however, Schafer teamed with the local historian Richard A. Martin to hone the Civil War-era portion of a two-volume Martin manuscript on Jacksonville’s past. Their collaboration resulted in the publication of *Jacksonville’s Ordeal by Fire: A Civil War History* (1984). That volume ranked upon its release as Florida’s most ambitious examination of the Civil War experience within a local community or region. Little wonder that its print run of five thousand sold out within five days.

Now, Schafer has revisited that earlier effort in order to present its story “with a more scholarly focus” (ix). Had he done nothing more than add an index to a new printing of the difficult-to-obtain older volume, his undertaking would have been applauded. Fortunately for Florida and Civil War history enthusiasts, he has done much more.