



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023

# JAMES

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL READERSHIP IN GEORGIA

CEO SPOTLIGHT  
PROOF OF THE PUDDING'S  
**ADAM NOYES**  
PAGE 36

## THE 2023 BUSINESS ISSUE



SUBSCRIBE  
OR \$3.95/COPY

COVER STORY: **SALUTING GEORGIA'S MILITARY VETERANS**

PREVIEWING GEORGIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRIORITIES

MICHAEL THURMOND ON GEORGIA'S FOUNDING FATHER

# James Oglethorpe

## THE FATHER of GEORGIA

by Michael Thurmond

Georgia was founded by James Oglethorpe—a British general, member of Parliament, philanthropist and Georgia’s first “governor”—and it was on February 12, 1733 when the British colony was envisioned as a unique economic development and social welfare experiment. Administered by 21 original trustees, the “Georgia Plan” offered England’s “worthy poor” an opportunity to achieve financial security by exporting goods produced on small farms. Most significantly, Oglethorpe and his fellow trustees were convinced that economic vitality could not be achieved through the exploitation of enslaved black laborers.

Due primarily to Oglethorpe’s strident advocacy, Georgia was the only British American colony to prohibit chattel slavery prior to the American Revolutionary War. Oglethorpe later asserted that the colony’s trustees prohibited slavery because it was “against the Gospel, as well as the fundamental law of England.” (Along with slavery, the idealistic trustees also banned lawyers and rum!)

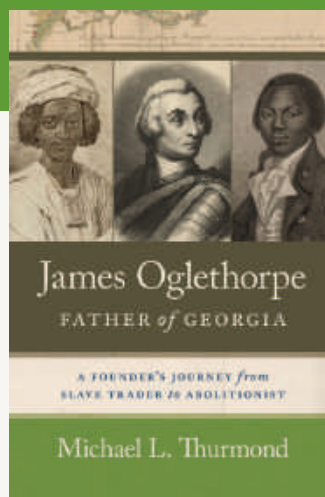
The genesis of Oglethorpe’s anti-slavery advocacy can be traced to a letter written by a young African Muslim named Ayuba Suleiman Diallo. In February 1730, Mandinka warriors captured Diallo near the mouth of Africa’s Gambia River and sold him to British slave traders. He survived the harrowing “Middle Passage” across the Atlantic Ocean and was enslaved by a Maryland colony tobacco plantation owner. Following a failed escape attempt, Diallo’s enslaver allowed the educated young man to write a letter to his father detailing his dire circumstances.

Written in Arabic, the letter passed through the hands of several white men until it was placed in the possession of Oglethorpe. (By the way, prior to the founding of the Georgia colony, Oglethorpe was a member of the British Parliament, chairman of the Associates of Dr. Bray, an Anglican evangelical society and deputy governor of the Royal African Company, a British slave trading enterprise.)

After having Diallo’s letter translated, Oglethorpe entered into an agreement with the Maryland slaveholder to purchase the enslaved young man and pay for his passage to England. And it was on December 21, 1732 when Diallo’s benefactor severed official ties with the slaving corporation. According to a 19th century Georgia historian, Diallo’s “history” had a profound effect on Oglethorpe’s “ideas” regarding slavery.

During the spring of 1733 while Oglethorpe was in North America, Diallo arrived in London, assumed a new

continued ☺



Using meticulous research and fresh historical analysis, Michael L. Thurmond rewrites the prehistory of American abolitionism and adds an important new chapter to Georgia’s origin story.

### James Oglethorpe

FATHER of GEORGIA

A FOUNDER’S JOURNEY *from* SLAVE TRADER *to* ABOLITIONIST

Michael L. Thurmond

HB: \$29.95 | 9780820366043



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS

[ugapress.org](http://ugapress.org)





Author & DeKalb County CEO Michael Thurmond

name “Job Ben Solomon,” and became a “roaring lion” of British society. The budding British celebrity was set free by British patrons, introduced to King George II and Queen Caroline, and on August 8, 1734 returned to what is modern day Senegal in Africa.

While Diallo was celebrating his miraculous rescue from bondage, pro-slavery Georgia colonists known as “malcontents” were arguing that deteriorating economic

conditions in the colony were due to the absence of enslaved black laborers. Along with a small group of anti-slavery supporters, Oglethorpe and the malcontents engaged in a divisive debate over the legalization of slavery in Georgia. Interestingly, the most vocal member of Oglethorpe’s anti-slavery chorus was John Wesley, a young Protestant evangelist who would become known as the “father of Methodism.”

Georgia’s principal founder became the target of a withering smear campaign that included claims of hypocrisy because of his alleged investment in a South Carolina plantation that utilized enslaved black laborers. Yet by January 1739, Oglethorpe anticipated 19th century

abolitionist sentiments by asserting that importation of enslaved laborers would “occasion the misery of thousands in Africa...and bring into perpetual slavery the poor people who now live free there.”

Finally, on July 22, 1743, Georgia’s most strident defender of the slavery prohibition exited his beloved colony. He sailed back home toward a future clouded by a pending court-martial and the possibility of financial ruin. The military charges ranged from larceny to treason. Reacting to complaints from pro-slavery colonists, British officials had also refused to reimburse Oglethorpe for substantial expenses he had incurred on behalf of the colony— pending a full accounting.

Although Oglethorpe was acquitted on all accounts, he never returned to Georgia. And less than a decade later, on January 1, 1751, Georgia’s slavery ban was repealed.

Prevailing historical narrative suggests that following his vindication, Oglethorpe gradually lost interest in the fight against slavery. To the contrary, the general’s abolitionist zeal reached its apex during the last two decades of his eventful life.

Oglethorpe reinvented himself as the center of gravity for an eclectic circle of anti-slavery friends and acquaintances. Most significantly, he mentored Olaudah Equiano, 18th century England’s most influential black abolitionist, Granville Sharp, one of the founders of the formal British abolitionist movement; and Hannah More, a feminist author who stoked opposition to the slave trade.

In the twilight of life, Oglethorpe handed off the nascent anti-slavery struggle that originated in the Georgia wilderness to emerging abolitionists who transformed it into a powerful international crusade.

*Michael Thurmond is the CEO of DeKalb County, Georgia’s one-time labor commissioner, a former state legislator and a native of Athens. His third book is James Oglethorpe: Father of Georgia.*



LET’S BUILD SOMETHING TOGETHER

Our contracting and construction principals and employees have extensive project experience collectively spanning over a century in markets throughout Georgia.

We’re proud that our accomplishments have earned us a reputation for world-class quality and excellence.

SGCONTRACTINGINC.COM