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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release

An Ocean In My Bones Updated as Full Stage Play for 5th Annual "Spirit of Our Ancestors Festival" Event Includes Documentary and Film Fest to Highlight Historic Africatown and Its Global Significance

(Mobile, AL January 30, 2023) -- New scenes of Dahomey warrior women, female historians and academics who chronicled Africatown's unique story, and stronger performances among returning actors have turned last year's 45-minute highlight of ***An Ocean in My Bones***, written and directed by Cleveland playwright Terrence Spivey, into a full-length play for the 5th Annual "Spirit of Our Ancestors Festival."

The 2023 festival -- hosted by The Clotilda Descendants Association (CDA) -- is spread across several venues in Mobile, mainly showing Africatown-related films and interviews for several days from Jan. 30th to Feb. 3rd. This year's theme is "Transcendent Warriors of Resilience."

Festival Organizer Joycelyn Davis, a CDA co-founder, reached out to Spivey in 2021, believing it was time for an original play to bring to life the stories she heard from childhood about the Africatown founders who had been brought from Africa aboard the *Clotilda* slave ship. Spivey wrote an initial script, recruited local acting talent, and developed the 45-minute highlight from the ground up for the CDA's 2022 festival.

But the 2023 production, with new material that has been added and expanded scenes from the initial 45-minute highlight, means the updated performance will be more than an hour long, making it a full-length play.

Spivey felt the need to "raise the bar" with new characters and updated dialogue based on new research. The returning actors -- many of whom never acted in a professional play -- have grown more committed to their new craft. "They have added more textured layers to their characters, so you will see different takes on how they play their roles," he says.

The original production featured a small scene with the Agojie, an elite corps of warrior women, and their King of Dahomey (in present-day Benin) because Cudjo "Kossola" Lewis recounts them as the ones responsible for raiding his village, killing the old, kidnapping the young, and selling him with many others into the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Cudjo was among 110 Dahomean captives purchased in 1860 by *Clotilda* Capt. William Foster and shipped as illegal cargo to Mobile plantation owner Timothy Meaher, who financed the voyage on a bet that he could get away with the crime (importing Africans to the U.S. as slaves was illegal in 1808).

The popular 2022 movie *Woman King*, a fictionalized film about the Agojie starring actress Viola Davis, helped Spivey recruit more actors who wanted to dramatize the "Benin Amazons" in the updated play. New roles in the play feature other women, including Emma Langdon Roche, a Mobilian who was the first person to chronicle the Clotilda Africans in her *Historic Sketches of The South* publication, and author/ anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, who travelled to Cudjo's Africatown home in 1927, noting his free life in Africa, his enslavement by Meaher, and his emancipated life in Mobile.

Other new characters in the play are academic historians: Dr. Natalie S. Robertson, author of *The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Making of AfricaTown, USA: Spirit of Our Ancestors*; Sylviane A. Diouf, author of *Dreams of Africa in Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America*; and Dr. Deborah G. Plant, who turned Hurston's interview notes with Cudjo into the 2018 best-selling book, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"*.

Spivey also added that American Theater magazine, the premiere national publication focused on nonprofit theater, is taking the unusual step of coming to Africatown to learn more about the play and interview Clotilda Descendants. "They usually only highlight large regional theater productions, so this is big," he says.

Registration for FREE tickets to the Feb. 4th Saturday performance is closed, so those wanting tickets for the Feb. 5th Sunday performance should register as soon as possible. See attached flyers for **updated** details about the film festival.

PROGRAM UPDATES: The keynote speaker will be Dr. Joy G. Kinard, new superintendent of Alabama's Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site and the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail. The CDA and Dr. Kern Jackson (who is also a co-writer of the documentary *Descendant*) with his students from the University of South Alabama will also offer oral interviews to collect family and Africatown histories from Descendants of Clotilda Africans, Africatown residents, historians, and those who are interested in participating.

-- more --

Clotilda Descendants Association Presents

SPiRiT OF OUR ANCESTORS FiLM FESTiVAL

FEATURED FILMS

- DESCENDANT (2022)
- AFRIKAN BY WAY OF AMERICAN (2021)
- SWEET HOME ALABAMA: A CHIEF AND HIS PROTEGE (2021)
- SURVIVING CLOTILDA (2021)
- 60 MINUTES: FINDING THE LAST SLAVE SHIP... (2020)
- CLOTILDA LAST AMERICAN SLAVE SHIP (2019)
- AFRICATOWN, USA (2019)

FREE TO THE PUBLIC

A.J. Cooper Municipal Complex
216 E PRICHARD AVE, PRICHARD, AL

Jan 30 - Feb 1
4PM - 6PM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
DR. JOY G. KINARD
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SPiRiT OF OUR ANCESTORS FiLM FESTiVAL

FEATURING "AN OCEAN IN MY BONES"

"An Ocean In My Bones"
A Play by Terrence Spivey

Free Showings

- Saturday, February 4th at 2:00 PM CST
- Sunday, February 5th at 2:00 PM CST

Mobile County Training School
800 Whitley Street
Mobile, Alabama 36610

see www.TheClotildaStory.com/Events

THECLOTILDASTORY.COM/EVENTS/
February 4-5, 2023 | Mobile County Training School
800 Whitley St. Mobile, Alabama

WHO: The Clotilda Descendants Association

WHAT: 5th Annual *"Spirit of Our Ancestors Festival,"* Theme: "Transcendent Warriors of Resilience."

WHEN: January 30 through February 5, 2023 (See more details below)

WHERE:

SPiRiT OF OUR ANCESTORS FiLM FESTiVAL

City of Prichard, A.J. Cooper Municipal Complex, Monday, Jan. 30th - Wednesday Feb. 1st, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Mobile Public Library-Ben May Auditorium, Thursday, Feb. 2nd, 5:30 PM -8:00 PM

Mobile Public Library-Toulminville Branch, Friday, Feb. 3rd, 12:30 PM -3:00 PM

Check website links and flyers for updated information on show times and post-film Q&A Sessions

SPiRiT OF OUR ANCESTORS FESTiVAL

SPiRiT OF OUR ANCESTORS PROGRAM @ MOBILE COUNTY TRAINING SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

Saturday, Feb. 4th & Sunday, Feb. 5th, Starting at Noon

800 Whitley Street, Mobile, AL 36610

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: DR. JOY G. KINARD

Superintendent of Alabama's Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site and the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail for the National Park Service

FREE PERFORMANCES OF AN OCEAN IN MY BONES, A PLAY By Terrence Spivey

Saturday, Feb. 4th @ 2:00 PM (REGISTRATION CLOSED) | Sunday, Feb. 5th @ 2:00 PM (REGISTRATION CLOSED)

Log In & Register for Free Tickets at www.TheClotildaStory.com/Events/

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For More Information, Contact: Joycelyn Davis, Organizer. Email: joycelyn.davis@aol.com