

Publisher's Release

“The case [Hyland] makes is persuasive and in my view well presented, and it's a historically important project.”---Peter Rodman, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution, and author of *Presidential Command: Power, Leadership, and the Making of Foreign Policy from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush*

“[Hyland's] approach to the alleged Jefferson-Hemings relationship is ingenious and he has made what I judge to be an irrefutable case.”—Professor Forrest McDonald, History Professor (Emeritus), University of Alabama, and National Endowment for the Humanities, 16th Jefferson Lecturer in the Humanities, author of *The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson* and *The American Presidency: An Intellectual History*

“Hyland's well-written book is a breath of fresh air.... In the courtroom where undocumented speculation and hearsay are not allowed, Jefferson will receive a fair trial.”---W. McKenzie Wallenborn, M.D., president of the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society and Clinical Professor (Ret.), University of Virginia School of Medicine

“As a practicing civil litigator and former prosecutor, Hyland casts a critical lawyer's eye over the two-hundred-year old question of whether Thomas Jefferson had a romantic, sexual liaison with his servant Sally Hemings. Using what would be acceptable in a court of law as his standard for accuracy, Hyland painstakingly separates revisionist ideology from historical accuracy. In page after page, Hyland dissects just how evidence was manipulated to reach a predetermined yet utterly false verdict of guilty. Thankfully, Hyland's book once and for all---in a convincingly unemotional fashion---clearly establishes that not Thomas Jefferson, but rather his brother Randolph or one of Randolph's sons, was the father of Sally Hemings's children.”---John Works Jr., former president of the Monticello Association and lineal descendant of Thomas Jefferson

“A well-written and provocative lawyer's brief challenging the popular story that Thomas Jefferson fathered a child by his household slave Sally Hemings. Hyland has assembled a mass of forensic evidence to refute the saga much favored by revisionist historians and novelists, who were building on the testimonies of Jefferson's political enemies from his own lifetime. Like the litigation attorney he is, Hyland argues a formidable case before a jury---readers trying to reach a verdict.”--- Peter Grose, former executive editor at *The New York Times* and *Foreign Affairs* and author of *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain*

“Hyland's book is well researched with material from many sources. It is a powerful insight.... As assistant to Dr. Foster, the DNA study coordinator, I can reveal that the DNA proved only that the Hemings descendant had Jefferson DNA that supported their oral family claim that they descended from a 'Jefferson uncle,' meaning Randolph Jefferson.”—Herbert Barger, Jefferson family historian

Description

The belief that Thomas Jefferson had an affair and fathered a child (or children) with slave Sally

Hemings---and that such an allegation was proven by DNA testing---has become so pervasive in American popular culture that it is not only widely accepted but taught to students as historical fact. But as William G. Hyland Jr. demonstrates, this “fact” is nothing more than the accumulation of salacious rumors and irresponsible scholarship over the years, much of it inspired by political grudges, academic opportunism, and the trend of historical revisionism that seeks to drag the reputation of the Founding Fathers through the mud. In this startling and revelatory argument, Hyland shows not only that the evidence against Jefferson is lacking, but that in fact he is entirely innocent of the charge of having sexual relations with Hemings.

Historians have the wrong Jefferson. Hyland, an experienced trial lawyer, presents the most reliable historical evidence while dissecting the unreliable, and in doing so he cuts through centuries of unsubstantiated charges. The author reminds us that the DNA tests identified Eston Hemings, Sally’s youngest child, as being merely the descendant of a “Jefferson male.” Randolph Jefferson, the president’s wayward, younger brother with a reputation for socializing among the Monticello slaves, emerges as the most likely of several possible candidates. Meanwhile, the author traces the evolution of this rumor about Thomas Jefferson back to the allegation made by one James Callendar, a “drunken ruffian” who carried a grudge after unsuccessfully lobbying the president for a postmaster appointment---and who then openly bragged of ruining Jefferson’s reputation. Hyland also delves into Hemings family oral histories that go against the popular rumor, as well as the ways in which the Jefferson rumors were advanced by less-than-historical dramas and by flawed scholarly research often shaped by political agendas.

Reflecting both a layperson’s curiosity and a lawyer’s precision, Hyland definitively puts to rest the allegation of the thirty-eight-year liaison between Jefferson and Hemings. In doing so, he reclaims the nation’s third president from the arena of Hollywood-style myth and melodrama and gives his readers a unique opportunity to serve as jurors on this enduringly fascinating episode in American history.