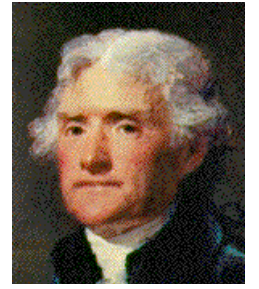


JEFFERSON NOTES



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COURSES ON JEFFERSON-HEMINGS SLANTED

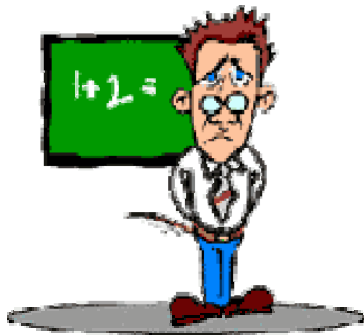
JeffersonNotes will examine from time to time various courses offered by colleges and universities on the paternity issue. It is almost universally true that these courses do not present the student with materials on both sides of this issue. The materials are slanted so the student understands that the "correct conclusion" is that Jefferson had a long relationship with Sally Hemings' and fathered all of her children. In this newsletter, we will look at some of these courses.

Wesleyan University

This is the introduction to the course:

Long before the Clinton-Lewinsky "coup de tart" made headlines, presidential peccadilloes were a subject of public interest, media speculation, and scholarly debate. This seminar examines and critiques the historical and fictional literature surrounding Thomas Jefferson's relationship with the slave Sally Hemings, with whom he is alleged to have had several children. Although this claim was long dismissed by most historians as a malicious rumor, DNA tests have now all but confirmed that Jefferson was indeed a founding father, with an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 black and white descendants living today.

So, the student is informed that the reading list comprises the "historical and fictional literature." The implication is that the instructor has provided a fairly balanced list. No references are given on the DNA tests which are the source of much dispute on



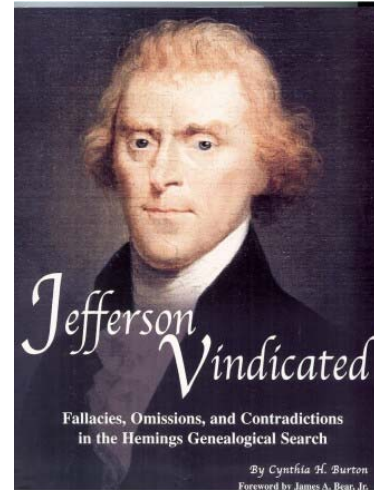
the extent to which they implicate Jefferson. The student is simply informed that those tests have "all but confirmed" Jefferson as the father of slave children. This is the list:

Ball, *Slaves in the Family*
Bernstein, *Thomas Jefferson*
Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson*
Brown, *Clotel, or the President's Daughter*

Chase-Riboud, *The President's Daughter*
Ellis, *An American Sphinx*
Lanier, *Jefferson's Children*

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BOOK NOTES



Jefferson Vindicated
Fallacies, Omissions, and Contradictions in the Hemings Genealogical Search
by Cynthia H. Burton
Foreword by James A. Bear, Jr.

As with all legends, the Sally story has a thread of historical truth. Sally Hemings, a young slave girl on the Monticello plantation, accompanied Thomas Jefferson's youngest daughter on the sea voyage to France. She returned with the Jefferson's and remained a slave until shortly after Jefferson's death. During that time, she bore four children who survived to adulthood. She never married and the fathers of the children remain unknown.

In 1802, a newspaper article claimed Jefferson was the father of her children. This claim has drifted about in the shadows of Jefferson's reputation until the 1998 DNA tests fueled the imagination of academics. Cynthia Burton is an experienced genealo-

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HOW ACADEMIA FAILED JEFFERSON

When the DNA test results in 1998 revealed that Eston Hemings had been fathered by someone in the Jefferson male line, it created a sensational story for the media. A small group of slave studies academics also claimed it validated their long held opinion that Thomas Jefferson fathered all of the children of Sally Hemings. Now that the furor has subsided, it is clear the tests provided no direct evidence that links Jefferson to Hemings. In fact, it stimulated a reexamination of James Callender's two hundred year old slander and has revealed the erroneous and often goofy arguments accepted by academics as proof of Jefferson's paternity.



Callender's Slander

It was intended as a slander when a vengeful James-Callender wrote in the *Richmond Recorder* in 1802 that Jefferson had fathered a child by one of his slaves. No evidence on the source of Calendar's information was included, nor has it ever been developed. The child identified by Callender was "Tom," since claimed to be Thomas Woodson. He is the ancestor of a large clan that continues to claim they are descendants of Thomas Jefferson although the DNA test proved otherwise.

Madison Remembers

An interview given by Madison Hemings fifty years after he left Monticello is the linchpin of the paternity believers. Here, Hemings claims that Jefferson is his father and the father of his siblings, although he offers no proof beyond the bare claim. Annette Gordon-Reed in her book, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*, argued that while white historians routinely dismissed Hemings' claim because he was black and uneducated, that actually Hemings should be believed because he was, well.. black and uneducated. Many academics rushed to do so, ignoring the numerous internal discrepancies in the Hemings interview. Slave studies historians seem ready to accept that the family tales passed down in black families are "oral history," and are entitled to historical validity.

Sally Hemings

The paternity crowd have struggled with the "who" of Sally Hemings. There is essentially nothing known about her. However, this does not stop excited descriptions of her as the mistress of Monticello, fluent in French, waiting patiently for Jefferson to return from his duties as President of the United States. No incident, no comment, and no writing, of any kind, inform us of Jefferson's attraction to Hemings. However, paternity supporters argue he must have been because she was his dead wife's half-sister. This old canard was run to ground and disposed by Rebecca L. McMurry and James F. McMurry, Jr. in their *Anatomy of a Scandal*.

Mystery Liaison

Obviously, the first element in this paternity scheme must be proof that Jefferson and Hemings had the means of sexual contact. When Thomas does return to Monticello, there must be a way for him to cohabit with Sally, a way that no one in his family who filled the rooms at Monticello can discover, and this arrangement must avoid detection for a period of at least twenty years and the pregnancies of five children. The Thomas Jefferson (Memorial) Foundation, which runs Monticello, released a staff report in 2000 that supported paternity. It was the perfect opportunity to describe the layout of the house and explain exactly how this lifetime liaison took place under the unsuspecting nose of the Jefferson family. Not surprisingly, this crucial issue was ignored. Since then the Foundation has posted on their website that "the evidence is not definitive, and the complete story may never be known."

"Single Father" Theory

On something so flimsy as the names given to their children, Madison Hemings and his siblings are declared to have the same father. Since Sally's life as a slave is totally unknown, this type of musing should rate no more than a half-hearted shrug, except the paternity believers need to jump from any Jefferson

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Slanted

Lewis, *Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture*

Anyone familiar with the literature on the Jefferson-Hemings paternity dispute will recognize immediately that all of the selections support the conclusion that Jefferson fathered children by Sally Hemings, except Ellis' American Sphinx. However, after the DNA tests, he reversed his position and became a convert to the paternity group. Two of the selections are admitted fiction.

William & Mary

The College of William & Mary is reaching down into the high schools to spread the Sally Story. A summer program is offered to rising freshman with seminars taught by doctoral students and visits to historical sites. Each night, the students will read "one or two essays from professional journals or from important monographs." Some of the readings identified are, "The Hemings Family," from the book, by Lucia Stanton, *Free Some Day: The African-American Families of Monticello*, and *Engaging Jefferson: Blacks and the Founding Father*, by Annette Gordon-Reed, from the William & Mary Quarterly.

Thomas Jefferson is identified in the course description as the "quintessential advocate of liberty for white men," and the student is advised at the outset that among his slaves was "Sally Hemings, the half-sister of his wife." But the most revealing statement in the syllabus is that "Jefferson's celebrated liaison with Hemings complicates our interpretation of his legacy." The paternity believers have always argued that Jefferson's contribution to the country's founding principles was not being challenged so this is a disturbing new step in his deconstruction.

Bridgewater College

Titled "Slavery and Virginia," this appears to be a survey history course. It will cover the impact of slavery on Virginia society and its ultimate constitutional crisis. The reading list seems to support this but among the four books is one that does not fit the syllabus, Annette Gordon-Reed's *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*. Her book does not explore slavery as a social or political institution. Her main theme is that Madison Hemings and his sibling were the children of Thomas Jefferson. The paternity claim is no longer the curiosity of a few, but to some professors it is an historical event, much like the writing of the Declaration of Independence.

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Book Notes

gist and was a researcher for the Scholars Commission. She has brought these skills to a systematic examination of the rumors, assumptions and faulty logic that now clings to the historical thread.

Her thematic target is the uneven treatment of the paternity issue in an article in the National Genealogical Society Quarterly. Burton proceeds to debunk the reliability of the Madison Hemings interview and the long held assumption that Sally Hemings was half-sister to Martha Jefferson. She demonstrates that the

layout of Monticello would have made it impossible for Jefferson to carry on a twenty-five year affair with Hemings, unknown to Jefferson's family.

The paternity legend starts with an assumption that Jefferson fathered children by Hemings. Only evidence that proves the assumption is considered. By such an inductive process the paternity believers reach their desired result. Burton's methodology is the correct one, to marshal the facts and then to connect the dots. When a researcher of the legend follows this model, the result is still a legend.

(Continued from page 2)

Failed

male as Eston's father, to Thomas Jefferson as Eston's father, and finally to Thomas as father of all Sally's children.

This "single father" theory is valid according to its supporters, because there is no record that Sally Hemings had more than one lover. Of course, Callender claimed otherwise, but on this point he is ignored. So, Sally, about whom nothing is known, is argued to be monogamous precisely because nothing is known about her having multiple partners. If that logic doesn't stagger you, there's more. *William and Mary Quarterly* actually published an article on a Monte Carlo simulation that concludes Thomas Jefferson was the father because he was at Monticello each time Hemings conceived. The expertise of the author as demonstrated by his success with these

mathematical simulations is not revealed. It is hard to understand how the paternity believers can put all this out with a straight face.

Tragedy of the Academics

It is understandable why the media trumpeted the DNA story. No one would have been interested in reading what the historians have written for 200 years, that the Sally story is legend. It is not clear why the media, always skeptical, did not question at the outset the procedures and circumstances under which blood samples were collected in the United States but sent to England for testing. But, in academia, we see the great failure that allowed a small group of committed paternity believers to foist a new test of "could he have" rather than "did he," and to change the way that the evidence should be evaluated.

The Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society has named John H. Works, Jr. for its 2006 Founders Award and Cynthia H. Burton for its 2006 Legacy Award. The Founders Award recognizes Mr. Works for his leadership in founding the Society and for his service as its first president. Mr. Works is a direct lineal descendant of Thomas and Martha Jefferson and is a past president of the Monticello Association. The Legacy award recognizes Ms. Burton for the most outstanding publication of a Jefferson related work in the past year making a significant contribution to the legacy and understanding of Thomas Jefferson.

**We welcome your support for the work of the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society.
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Please make checks payable to TJHS and forward to Box 4482, Charlottesville, VA 22905

Little Mountain	\$ 25.00
Rotunda	100.00
Memorial	250.00

**All contributors will receive a copy of *The Jefferson-Hemings Myth: An American Tragedy*.
Rotunda and Memorial contributors will also receive *Jefferson Vindicated*.**

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