

Jefferson Hoax Exposed!

Chronicles

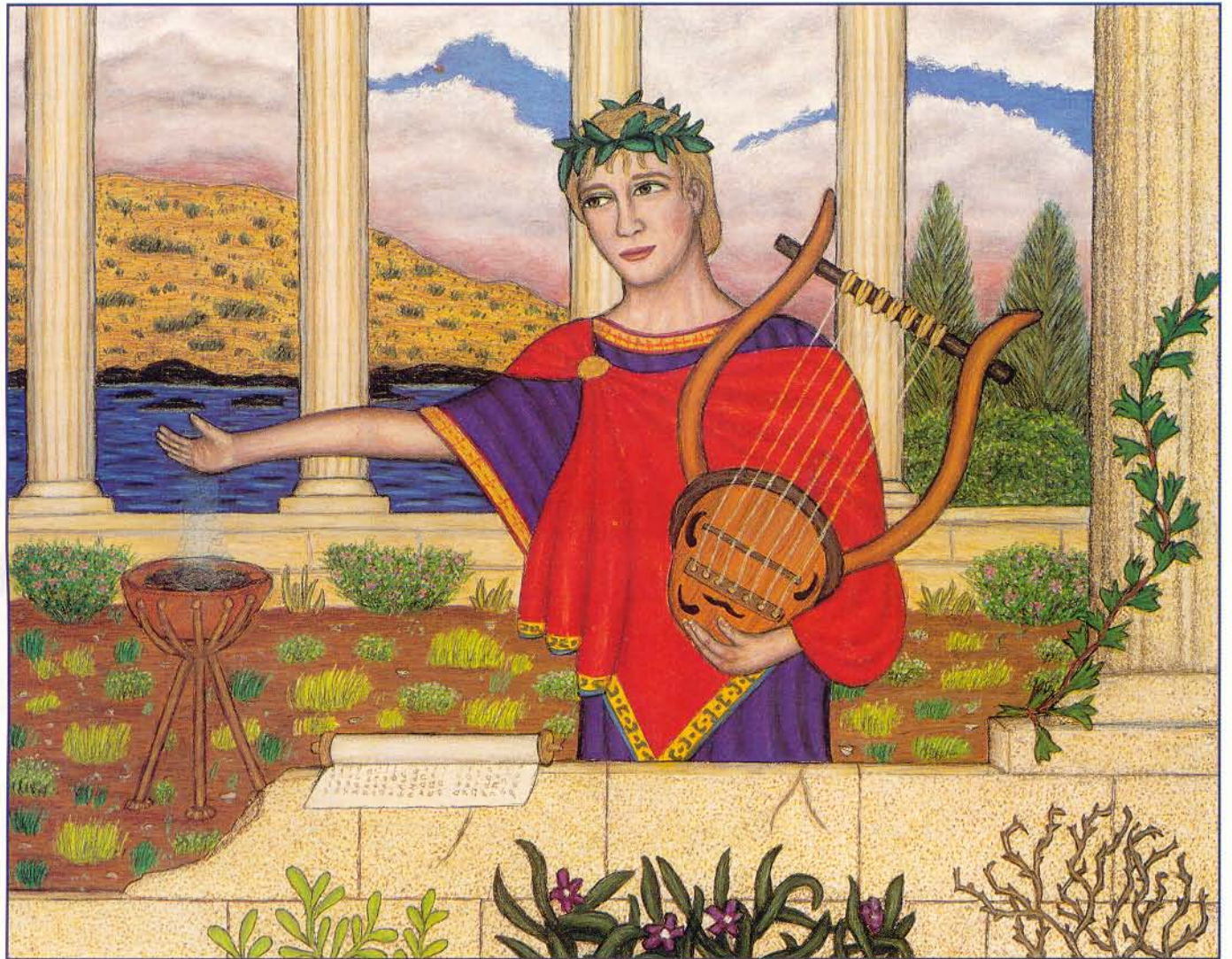
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Cultural Alienation

Hollywood Lies, 60's Radicals Rise,
Nero Rules!



News Unfit to Print:

World Condemns Clinton's
Attack on Iraq



Every competent history student or teacher knows the allegations concerning Jefferson and Sally Hemings. Yet one Clintonite was given time on National Public Radio to announce that, until Ellis's piece, "white historians" had engaged in a vast conspiracy to obliterate any suspicion of the affair. If such a plot existed, it was spectacularly unsuccessful, as the original accusation was widely published in newspapers in 1802 (at the beginning of Jefferson's first term as president), regularly reprinted (and regularly rebutted), dwelt on at length in every biography of Jefferson since the first one during his lifetime, and repeated throughout the rest of the 19th and 20th centuries, including in some high-school textbooks, a best-selling bodice-ripper, screen presentations, and, finally, two full-length history books devoted exclusively to this scandal, both of which were widely reviewed. Even tour guides at Monticello mention the scandal, though dismissively. It appears that the only people from whom the "white conspiracy" succeeded in hiding the allegations were the folks at National Public Radio.

In Jefferson's time, guests at Monticello were fully aware that almost all of the Jefferson family's house servants, adult and child, were "quadroons" and "octoroons" (not "mulattos," as is commonly said). Being only one-fourth, one-eighth, or, in some cases, one-sixteenth of African descent, most of them could, in the phrase of the day, "pass for white." Yet none of Jefferson's numerous and highly influential visitors ever accused him, privately or publicly, of sexual misconduct, nor was there any scandal until the fateful year of 1802, when the notorious James T. Callender came along.

I am indebted to the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Virginius Dabney, author of *The Jefferson Scandals*, for assembling all the sources. James T. Callender was a Scot who, facing trial for sedition in London in the 1790's, fled to America. He became a writer for the *Philadelphia Gazette*, the house organ of the (original) Republican Party, the faction founded by Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was delighted with Callender's vicious, if unfounded, attacks on luminaries of the rival Federalist Party. Callender called Washington a "scandalous hypocrite" who "authorized the robbery and ruin of his own army" in the Revolution, and John Adams "a British spy." He also slandered Madison. But none of the mud ever seemed to stick. Callender's first modest success was when he accused Alexander Hamilton of embezzling funds from the Treasury while serving as its secretary. Hamilton proved that the money was his own, but it had been handled mysteriously for the purpose of paying off a blackmailer who had threatened to expose a love affair between Hamilton and the blackmailer's wife. This discovery confirmed Callender in his career of dynamite-fishing—tossing out a fabricated slander in the hope that some unrelated piece of muck would float up to the surface.

Callender was indicted, tried, and convicted under the (un-constitutional) Sedition Act of 1798 for slandering President Adams. When Jefferson became President in 1801, true to his principled opposition to Adams' monarchical pretensions, he promptly pardoned all who had been convicted, including Callender, and released them from jail. But the federal government was slow in returning the fines which Callender and the other convicts had paid. Although Jefferson himself finally paid a portion of Callender's fine, the latter, Dabney records, brooded over his maltreatment and was determined to be rewarded with the Richmond postmastership, which paid \$1,500 a year, for his services to the Republican Party.

When President Jefferson refused to appoint him or to respond to his letters, Callender threatened to release information damaging to Jefferson. The President refused to pay what he called "hush money," writing to Governor James Monroe of Virginia that Callender "knows nothing of me which I am not willing to declare before the world." Callender then obtained employment at the *Recorder*, the house organ of the (now opposition) Federalist Party, and began assaulting President Jefferson savagely. Throughout each of several absurd and quickly disproved slanders, Jefferson remained silent, following the principle he had announced to Samuel Smith in 1798: "Were I to undertake to answer the calumnies of the newspapers, it would be more than all my own time, and that of twenty aids [sic] could effect, for while I should be answering one, twenty new ones would be invented. I have thought it better to trust to the justice of my countrymen. . . ."

Callender soon heard of the mixed-race servants at Monticello and promptly announced that the long-widowed Jefferson had a "Congo harem." He had also heard the name "Sally Hemings" and began to write of "dusky Sally," "black Sal," "the black wench and her mulatto litter," and the "mahogany colored charmer." (He had obviously never seen the very light-skinned Hemings.) The Federalist press gleefully repeated the charge. Eminent historian James Truslow Adams, in *The Living Jefferson*, concluded that every mention of the Sally Hemings scandal can be traced back to Callender's articles. Nevertheless, the slander grew until it included the accusation that Jefferson had sold his own "black" children into prostitution in New Orleans. By the 1820's, the entire scandal, though heard by all, was believed by none, and it took the rise of the Abolitionist movement and William Lloyd Garrison's publication of the poem, "Jefferson's Daughter," to revive the slander. A few other Abolitionists made their own efforts at defamation, but since these merely served to alienate them from their countrymen, North and South, they soon gave up.

In 1974, at the height of the popularity of "psychohistory," Professor Fawn Brodie of the University of California at Los Angeles came out with *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*. A Book of the Month Club selection and a great commercial success, the book was not a history in any reasonable sense of the term. It was roundly denounced by the historians who reviewed it; the only positive reviews it received were from writers who specialized in fiction. The book is a collection of wild speculation and Freudian "analysis," with whole sections on what Jefferson "must have thought," "must have meant," and "probably did."

Brodie bought the story that all of Sally Hemings' offspring were Jefferson's, which required that the first child, whom Callender called "Yellow Tom" and Brodie called "Tom," was born immediately after Jefferson returned with his servants to Monticello from France, in 1789. The only problem with "Tom" is that he never existed. The meticulous records of slave births at Monticello show none of that name within 10 years of 1789. Although Sally would have been quite visibly pregnant throughout the sea voyage from France to America, none of the passengers who daily saw her and her constant companion, Jefferson's daughter Mary, ever noticed the 16-year-old's supposed state. In the late 19th century, a Thomas Woodson, living in Ohio and of partial African descent, claimed to have been the illegitimate child of Hemings and Jefferson. He offered no evidence and was forgotten, until Brodie decided that he must be Jefferson's child.

While Brodie reads "passion" into Sally's decision to come back to Virginia with Jefferson, since she would have been free had she stayed in Paris, the fact is that all of Jefferson's slaves made the same decision to return.

I will not waste much more space on Brodie's silliness. Virginius Dabney has meticulously rebutted every one of her contentions. I especially enjoyed Dabney's response to Brodie's claim that Jefferson's book on French Agriculture clearly reveals that his mind was on his "mulatto" Sally Hemings, not asparagus crops. Her proof? Jefferson refers to a "plough," which, Brodie assures us, is the "ancient symbolism" for sex, and also discusses the color of French soil. Equally absurd is Brodie's assertion that Jefferson's remodeling of his portico from square to semi-circular proves his obsession with Sally's breasts. Suffice it to say that Brodie's book, despite its popularity, has never been cited by a reputable historian, for any purpose, since Dabney's book came out. It was Brodie's discredited work, however, that Joe Ellis gave to his geneticist collaborators. They innocently cited it as a main source for their genetic study of the Jefferson family. The only other source they cite that supports their thesis is Ellis's own book.

The greatest difficulty for any historian is to put himself in the frame of mind common to the period which he is examining. This difficulty is nothing new, but it is harder than ever in the current age of political correctness, psychobabble, and racial controversy. Modern writers are perennially shocked that black slavery, common throughout most of the civilized (and uncivilized) world in the 18th and early 19th centuries, was not viewed in the same light as it is today. Throughout his life, Jefferson believed that slavery was a social evil, but he, like most intelligent men of his day, could think of no immediate solution that would not cause the total destruction of the Virginian civilization which he revered. He freed some of his slaves after herculean efforts to teach them crafts which would allow them to prosper in free society. Still, toward the end of his long life, Jefferson defended the South against demands for instant abolition by Northerners who had passed laws which prohibited free blacks from entering, much less being employed in, some of their states. Throughout his adult life, Jefferson denounced any form of miscegenation. In other words, Thomas Jefferson was, in many ways, a product of his time. Just as Joe Ellis is a product of *his* time, more's the pity.

Now we must examine the supposedly impartial science of Ellis's geneticists. A general rule of law, as well as of historical research, is that it is impossible, or nearly so, to prove a negative, so the burden of proof has always been on the accuser. The contrary would be a great boon to writers like Brodie and Ellis, but it would ultimately destroy the concept of history.

With a public still dazzled by the trappings of science, supporting an historical editorial with "scientific discoveries" involving terms and concepts unintelligible to even the best educated of non-specialist readers is a formula for success. My own years of trial work have shown me the value of "expert, scientific witnesses."

When the science consists of DNA analysis, and the public is subjected to babble about genetic codes as the basis for everything from forensic evidence at famous criminal trials, to the pseudoscience behind the blockbuster movie *Jurassic Park*, to Monica's dress, few can be expected to read beyond the title, "Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child." However, readers who take the trouble (and enough No-Doz) will find that the ge-

neticist authors did not make such a categorical conclusion.

The only circumstance that honest historians find suspicious is the fact, noted by some visitors to Monticello, that the Hemingses and the Jeffersons resembled each other. What was not generally known at the time, though known to Jefferson himself, was that Sally was the daughter of the Englishman John Wayles and the "bright mulatto" Elizabeth Hemings (daughter of an English sea-captain Hemings), whom Wayles took as his permanent concubine in 1761, after the death of his third wife.

This same John Wayles was Thomas Jefferson's father-in-law. Wayles, through his first wife, Martha Eppes, had a daughter, Martha, later Mrs. Thomas Jefferson. She and Sally Hemings were half-sisters. In fact, all five of Sally's siblings (the "Hemings family") bore the same kinship to Martha. Through his wife, Thomas Jefferson inherited the light-skinned Hemingses as slaves. That is why the Hemings children bore resemblance to his children, and why he gave the Hemings family preferential treatment.

To the layman, these facts would appear to absolve Jefferson of any blame for a genetic similarity between the two families two centuries later. This may explain why Ellis and his geneticist collaborators make no mention of the Wayles connection in their article. The geneticists were careful to limit their inquiry to the part of the genetic code concerning the Y chromosome, which can be transmitted only through the male line, thus making the Wayles connection at least *theoretically* moot.

Because Thomas Jefferson had no sons who survived to adulthood, the geneticists gathered their information on the President's Y chromosome by testing the presumed descendants of his paternal uncle, Field Jefferson (excluding any illegitimacy before or after Field's birth).

Since Brodie's book identified Thomas Woodson as the (non-existent) "Yellow Tom," and five of his male-line descendants could be traced, the geneticists wasted a third of their study on the Woodson line, only to find no similarity to Jefferson's presumed uncle's presumed descendants' Y chromosome among the five. Ellis desperately speculates that maybe Tom Woodson's children, or theirs, were illegitimate, but he never hints at the possibility of illegitimacy in Field Jefferson's or, later, in Eston Hemings' line, and with good reason: His house of cards would fall.

So Thomas Woodson was a washout genetically. What about Sally's son Madison, born in 1805 and of extensive historical record? Did he have a traceable male line of descent? Ellis's geneticists do not mention him, so one must conclude that either his name was withheld from the scientists, or he, too, was a washout in the genetic search for Thomas Jefferson, and therefore an unperson in the article.

That leaves us with Sally's youngest son, Eston. The scientists were informed that Ellis had found one of Eston's descendants—at least, he says he is descended from that particular line of the prolific Hemings. Relying on an "oral tradition of the descendants of Martha Jefferson Randolph" who believed that Eston was the son of either Samuel or Peter Carr (the sons of Jefferson's sister), the geneticists then wasted another fourth of their study on the Carr family. Another washout.

Finally, the geneticists found something of a match: Four of the five presumed descendants of Thomas Jefferson's Uncle Field had a Y chromosome similar to that of the one putative descendant of Eston Hemings. The geneticists conclude that "The simplest and most probable explanation" is that Thomas Jefferson was at least "100 times more likely" to be Eston's pu-

tative descendant's ancestor than was someone unrelated to the Jefferson family. (That ratio is not quite Clinton's 7.87 trillion times more likely.) However, at least eight other male descendants of Thomas Jefferson's grandfather (and Field Jefferson's father), Thomas Jefferson II, including President Jefferson's younger brother Randolph and Randolph's six sons, lived nearby and stayed at Monticello regularly, so each of *them* is also "100 times more likely" to be Eston's or his putative son's father than someone unrelated. (Try that on your computer.)

The article makes no mention of Randolph Jefferson's prolific line, any more than that of poor Madison Hemings. Could they have *all* died out by the time of the study? Randolph Jefferson and his descendants were the majority of the Jefferson family, and far closer to Thomas Jefferson by blood than either Field Jefferson or any of Field's descendants. Examination of Randolph Jefferson's male-line descendants either would have greatly multiplied the number of suspected slave abusers, or, if their Y chromosome differed from the presumed descendants of Eston Hemings or Field Jefferson, would have destroyed any connection between Thomas Jefferson and Eston Hemings.

Of course, there are also other "simple and probable" explanations, including the fact that Eston lived in the vicinity of Field Jefferson's family and numerous Randolph Jefferson progeny until 1835, and therefore Eston's descendants may have been the first to have the Field (or Randolph?) Jefferson-like gene. The geneticists admit this last possibility (without mentioning the Randolph Jefferson line, of course) but, "in the absence of historical evidence," they consider it "unlikely." Odd that the "absence of historical evidence" is noticed by the scientists only at the end of their article.

There is also the possibility that any of the male-line descendants of Field or Randolph Jefferson had relations with *any* of the female Heminges over the next 200 years, before or after emancipation, thus introducing the Jeffersons' Y chromosome without the involvement of Thomas Jefferson or Sally Hemings. The Shenandoah Valley of Virginia was not exactly a genetic metropolis.

Now, let us throw in some other complications ignored by, or unknown to, the geneticists who wrote the article. The Hemings family had not only been born to and lived with John Wayles, Thomas Jefferson's randy father-in-law, but also belonged to and lived with the heavily male Eppes family, Wayles' in-laws. Thomas Jefferson's daughter, Mary, whose companion and maid was Sally Hemings, married John Wayles Eppes, who himself was descended from both the Wayles and Eppes families. As even Brodie admits in her book, the Wayles, Eppes, and Jefferson families—like the Wilkes family in *Gone With the Wind*—"always married their [first] cousins." Randolph Jefferson, the President's brother, married Anna Jefferson Lewis, their first cousin and also the sister of Charles Lilburn Lewis, who in turn married the President's and Randolph Jefferson's sister, Lucy. Randolph's son, Thomas Jefferson, Jr., married Mary Randolph Lewis, Lucy Jefferson Lewis's daughter and, therefore, his first cousin through *two* lines. Keeping up? Field Jefferson's family, the one used in the article, is at least equally inbred. Granted that the Y chromosome is carried only by the male line, we still do not have any idea when the "Field Jefferson" Y chromosome entered either family, but we do have plenty of male involvement from each of the three families with the other two families and with the Hemings family. As late as 1825, the family of Francis Eppes was managing Poplar Forest, Thomas Jefferson's residence in Bedford Coun-


ty, when the Hemings family was there for rebuilding after a fire, possibly adding to the genetic stew.

Any little old lady living in genteel poverty in Charlottesville, surrounded by her stacks of genealogical charts, can make a dog's breakfast of an agenda-driven genetic study. The *Nature* article is not even genetics: It is necromancy.

The science of genetics cannot be used for historical research without a top-notch historian and the most complete genealogies possible. The courtroom equivalent of genealogies is the "chain of custody" of evidence; any weak link in the chain of custody will utterly destroy the finest forensic "proof."

Maybe I am being too harsh on Joe Ellis's geneticists. After their "findings" were disputed by other geneticists, Dr. Eugene Foster, lead author of the *Nature* article, told the *Washington Times* that the media "went too far" with their interpretation. He is now distancing himself from Ellis's article in the same magazine, and even from his own article's title.

But the historical damage is done. The attention-span of the media and the public has been exceeded. Jefferson's legacy will always be overshadowed by this new sexual myth, invented to make his modern namesake look less morally corrupt.

Ellis insists that he was only out to show that past presidents, like the current one, were "flesh-and-blood humans." I consider myself a flesh-and-blood human, but I sincerely hope Joe Ellis never sets out to prove me one. 

1956: Posture Photos

by Jared Carter

A high-ceilinged room, somewhere in the gymnasium. Undress, clutch a towel, stay in line, practice tilting your pelvis down, making your spine as straight as possible. Did someone come along with a grease pencil and draw a line down your back? Were you handed a number to hold? I can't remember now. The next guy says the girls at Wellesley have to do it too. Wait there, with all the other freshmen, until your name is called. Step forward, stand at the mark. Spotlights show you from all angles. This exposure is simultaneous: front, side, and rear. Your naked body will be converted into numbers. It is for your own good. If your posture proves acceptable, you will be excused from gym class for the rest of the year. So innocuous, so quickly forgotten. And even now, forty years later, after the articles in *The Times*, after the scandal has died down, and the authorities have assured us that all the prints have been burned, the negatives destroyed—one remembers how easy it was for them to tell such lies. And how easy, too, for us to have believed in them.