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Decision wasn't about bigotry

By 0, 5/16/2002

AS A LINEAL descendant of Thomas Jefferson I was dismayed by Thomas Oliphant's column "Jefferson group's genteel bigotry" (op ed, May 7).

For the Monticello Association members, race was not an issue when it voted overwhelmingly to limit membership to descendants of Jefferson's two daughters. Members had spent three years listening to and reading about all sides of the matter.

The Monticello Association based its opinion on biographical information provided by many historians, DNA studies, and a recent report by a commission of 13 scholars that included authors of works about Jefferson.

The commission looked carefully at all the arguments raised in support of Jefferson's paternity of Sally Hemings's children, noted that some of the evidence had been tampered with, voted that the case had not been proven, and, with a single mild dissent, concluded that Jefferson was probably not the father.

CATHERINE COOLIDGE LASTAVICA, Manchester by the Sea

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