

# SCIENCE INSIGHTS

NEWS AND COMMENTARY FROM THE  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

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## The President Extends Thanks—and a Welcome

From its rebirth earlier this year, NAS's science newsletter enjoyed the able stewardship of Lee Zwanziger and Malcolm Sherman. Alas, other commitments—both within and outside of NAS—soon made continued service a daunting task. At their request, we began the search for a new editor during our summer publication break.

Fortunately, NAS member Patricia Hausman agreed to take the reins. Patti has been an active participant in our Virginia chapter since she first joined NAS about five years ago. A behavioral scientist with a background in the life sciences, she takes over the editorship with this issue.

Patti brings to NAS a wealth of experience as an author and editor with a keen ability to unearth unusual or underreported findings. I want to welcome her aboard—and again express our thanks to Drs. Zwanziger and Sherman for their contributions. They will continue to serve in an advisory capacity.

This newsletter also has a new name, one reflecting our desire to include more commentary. What remains unchanged is our desire to receive article ideas and submissions from readers. Please send them to the editor at [sciencenews@nas.org](mailto:sciencenews@nas.org).

- Joe Conley, a graduate student at Princeton University, presented a [scholarly analysis](#) of claims made by a Louisiana representative in her unsuccessful effort to have the state legislature condemn Darwinism as racist. Conley concluded that a careful reading of Darwin's writings "points to his racial liberalism by the standards of Victorian England. He adds that "appropriations of Darwin's ideas to support racist ideologies suggests that these did not represent straightforward applications of Darwinism to society and that various groups have historically found in Darwin what they have wanted to find."
- For a listing of all recent challenges to teaching of evolution, see the [special update page](#) maintained by the American Geological Institute.

## Scholars Challenge Jefferson-Hemings Allegations

A careful, year-long analysis of claims that Thomas Jefferson fathered one or more children of his slave, Sally Hemings, has yielded stunning conclusions—but received little media attention.

In a stark challenge to earlier reports, all but one of the 13 scholars expressed considerable skepticism about the charge. Some went so far as to express a "conviction that it is almost certainly not true." The Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society (TJHS) initiated the study, but allowed its members to work independently.

According to the [scholars' report](#), much of the evidence against Jefferson consists of misleading or inaccurate facts. Among the most shocking is the revelation that a key document says *precisely the opposite* of what proponents of the allegation claim.

The document is a handwritten letter penned by Jefferson's granddaughter, Ellen Randolph Coolidge. In her book *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings*, New York Law School professor Annette Gordon-Reed describes the letter as stating, "*No female domestic ever entered his [Jefferson's] chambers except at hours when he was known not to be in the public gaze.*"

The report, however, includes a [photocopy of Coolidge's letter](#). Her handwriting is not at all difficult to read. The relevant passage states:

*His apartments had no private entrance not perfectly accessible and visible to all the household. No female domestic ever entered his chambers except at hours when he was known not to be there, and none could have entered without being exposed to the public gaze.*

The scholars also discuss the DNA testing that has been touted as proof of Jefferson's paternity. According to their report, the scientists who performed the tests acknowledged, when pressed, that the results confirm only that one of more than two dozen males in the Jefferson family is the father of Eston, Sally Hemings's youngest son. The report explains:

*[E]very knowledgeable authority we have consulted, including other scientists who conducted the tests, has denied that these tests could possibly have distinguished among the male members of the Jefferson family in determining the paternity of Eston Hemings. These tests compared nineteen markers on the Y chromosomes of fourteen individuals: five living male-line descendants of two sons of Thomas Jefferson's paternal uncle, who was assumed to have the same Y chromosome as Jefferson's father and thus of Jefferson himself, three male-line descendants of three sons of the paternal grandfather of Peter and Samuel Carr, 1 five male-line descendants of two sons of Thomas Woodson, and one male-line descendant of Eston Hemings. The results showed a match between the haplotypes of the Jefferson descendants and the Eston Hemings descendant, but no other matches. In plain words, they showed that a descendant of one of Sally Hemings' children carries Jefferson genetic markers, not those of the Carr brothers, which effectively rules out the possible paternity of Sally Hemings' youngest child by any of the Carr brothers and points to some male Jefferson as his likely father.*

Further, the report cites credible evidence suggesting that a younger brother, Randolph Jefferson, was more likely to have fathered Eston than Thomas Jefferson himself.

Robert F. Turner, of the University of Virginia, chaired the commission. Other members who endorsed the majority view were Lance Banning, University of Kentucky; James Ceaser, University of Virginia; Robert H. Ferrell, Indiana University; Charles R. Kesler, Claremont McKenna College; Alf J. Mapp, Jr., Old Dominion University; Harvey C. Mansfield, Harvard University; David N. Mayer, Capital University; Forrest McDonald, University of Alabama; Thomas Traut, University of North Carolina School of Medicine; Walter E. Williams, George Mason University; and Jean Yarbrough, Bowdoin College.

Also on the panel was Paul Rahe, a professor of history at the University of Tulsa. Rahe described himself as in "general agreement" with the report. Nonetheless, he did not vote with the other members out of a belief that it is "somewhat more likely than not" that Jefferson was, in fact, the father of Eston Hemings.

## Institute of Medicine Reports on the Biology of Sex Differences

A division of the National Academies has released a surprisingly frank report on sex differences. The work, entitled [Exploring the Biological Contribution to Human Health: Does Sex Matter?](#), was prepared by a panel convened by its Institute of Medicine.

As for the question posed in the subtitle, the panel clearly believes the answer is yes. Its strong opinion is revealed in the preface, where the committee chair writes, "Sex matters. It matters in ways that we did not expect. Undoubtedly, it also matters in ways that we have not begun to imagine."

Early chapters of the book address basic genetic and cellular differences between the sexes and how differences manifest at various stages of development. Later, the book turns to sex differences in response to external stimuli such as drugs and pathogens. Though the work ostensibly focuses on health and disease, it includes a chapter on cognitive and behavioral sex differences. This chapter stands out as by far the most