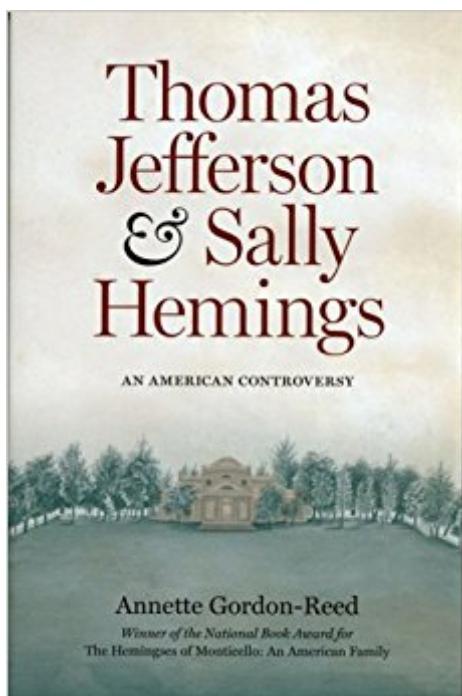


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# Thomas Jefferson And Sally Hemings: An American Controversy



## Synopsis

When Annette Gordon-Reed's groundbreaking study was first published, rumors of Thomas Jefferson's sexual involvement with his slave Sally Hemings had circulated for two centuries. Among all aspects of Jefferson's renowned life, it was perhaps the most hotly contested topic. The publication of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings intensified this debate by identifying glaring inconsistencies in many noted scholars' evaluations of the existing evidence. In this study, Gordon-Reed assembles a fascinating and convincing argument: not that the alleged thirty-eight-year liaison necessarily took place but rather that the evidence for its taking place has been denied a fair hearing. Friends of Jefferson sought to debunk the Hemings story as early as 1800, and most subsequent historians and biographers followed suit, finding the affair unthinkable based upon their view of Jefferson's life, character, and beliefs. Gordon-Reed responds to these critics by pointing out numerous errors and prejudices in their writings, ranging from inaccurate citations, to impossible time lines, to virtual exclusions of evidence—especially evidence concerning the Hemings family. She demonstrates how these scholars may have been misguided by their own biases and may even have tailored evidence to serve and preserve their opinions of Jefferson. This updated edition of the book also includes an afterword in which the author comments on the DNA study that provided further evidence of a Jefferson and Hemings liaison.

Possessing both a layperson's unfettered curiosity and a lawyer's logical mind, Annette Gordon-Reed writes with a style and compassion that are irresistible. Each chapter revolves around a key figure in the Hemings drama, and the resulting portraits are engrossing and very personal. Gordon-Reed also brings a keen intuitive sense of the psychological complexities of human relationships—relationships that, in the real world, often develop regardless of status or race. The most compelling element of all, however, is her extensive and careful research, which often allows the evidence to speak for itself. Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy is the definitive look at a centuries-old question that should fascinate general readers and historians alike.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

Annette Gordon-Reed, a professor of law at New York Law School, doesn't take a position for or against the proposition that Thomas Jefferson may have had a liaison of nearly 40 years with a slave named Sally Hemings, and that Hemings may have borne him several children. Instead, in this scrupulously researched book, Gordon-Reed examines the evidence both for and against Jefferson's liaison with Hemings. Among the strongest evidence in this provocative book is the fact that though Jefferson's time in Virginia was limited when he was in public life, Hemings's six children--born over 15 years--were delivered with months after each of Jefferson's stays at Monticello. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Historian Ellis (Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams, LJ 4/15/93) does not attempt to give a full-scale biography of the Sage of Monticello. Rather, he offers a balanced meditation on Jefferson's character and ideals. Reaffirming and taking further what some previous authors have stated, Ellis maintains that Jefferson's ambiguous, secretive character was able to support mutually contradictory positions on a variety of issues. Moreover, Jefferson often retreated into romantic illusions rather than face reality. Ellis's work is based on many years of research into this period of American history, and it is perfectly pitched to appeal to both general readers and specialists. Attorney Gordon-Reed (law, New York Law Sch.) presents a lawyer's analysis of the evidence for and against the proposition that Jefferson was the father of several children born to his household slave Sally Hemings. Gordon-Reed is not concerned with Jefferson and Hemings as much as she is with how Jefferson's defenders have dealt with the evidence about the case. Her book takes aim at such noteworthy biographers as Dumas Malone, who has been quick to accept evidence against a liaison and quick to reject evidence for one. In sum, the Jefferson who emerges from these two books is a great though deeply flawed man. Both books are highly recommended as essential reading for all libraries. Thomas J. Schaeper, St. Bonaventure Univ., N.Y. Copyright 1997

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great info on history every one should read

Ms Gordon-Reed is very articulate and her book is an interesting read.

I read the text and took notes. It is very much like a textbook. I enjoyed the facts and found many of them enlightening. Which changed my understanding of who Thomas Jefferson was. I believe it would make an excellent book for discussion question.

A good read even if some facts are questionable historically

A very in depth analysis. Analyzes the times and dates as well as where the names came from

We will never truly know the truth, but the DNA evidence is pretty compelling. Food for thought. Very well written.

great read...many unknown facts

It's the first time in my life I can feel the slavery troubles. Being from another country with no African American people issue, it's not possible to have a notion of those suffering souls. They are mothers, daughters, sons become from human beings into slaves by other human beings that don't care about their feelings, love and suffering. And politics care about the matter. It was enlightening!!

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