Mourning at Monticello

by Andrew M. Davenport

As he lay dying in the bedchamber of his Monticello plantation in Charlottesville, Virginia, in July 1826, the 83-year-old Thomas Jefferson likened himself to a fading timepiece. "I am like an old watch," he told a grandson, "with a pinion worn out here, and a wheel there, until it can go no longer."[1] The ill Jefferson lingered before death's threshold, but he willed himself to survive until July 4. As he moved back and forth between fits of delirium and lucidity, he asked, "Is it the Fourth?" hoping to confirm the date.[2] He seemed pleased to die on the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson's last words, whispered to one or two enslaved persons who attended him, have never come to light.[3]

Historians have pored over the written accounts of Jefferson's last days and hours for nearly two centuries. These documents reveal how Jefferson's white relatives mourned the death of their patriarch. Their grief would soon be reflected in national mourning rituals which, in the white American popular consciousness, canonized Jefferson as the apostle of freedom. But for Jefferson's nearly two hundred enslaved African Americans, his death brought untold suffering and separation.[4] In an attempt to rescue themselves from financial ruin, Jefferson's white relatives sold away nearly all the enslaved people.[5]

Considering how Jefferson's death affected the hundreds of African Americans he enslaved, as well as their descendants, shifts attention away from his achievements and toward a

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[1] "Thomas Jefferson Randolph's Account of Thomas Jefferson's Death," in Henry S. Randall, *Life of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, NY: Derby & Jackson, 1858), III, 543–4.
2 Samuel X. Radbill, ed., *The Autobiographical Ana of Robley Dunglison, M.D.* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1963), 32-33.
[3] Randall, *Jefferson*, III, 543–4.
[4] Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2008), 655.
[5] Ibid., 631.

more comprehensive understanding of the profoundly unequal, entangled Monticello community and the "free" nation they lived within, and which Americans have inherited. Although the fates of the vast majority of Jefferson's enslaved community are unknown,[6] historians and researchers continue to search for those who were sold during the aftermath of Jefferson's death in a concerted attempt to reunite long-ago fractured Black American families and reconstruct an account of what occurred on and beyond Jefferson's Monticello.

When Jefferson left the President's House in March 1809, he resolved to spend as much time at Monticello as he could. "I am full of plans of employment when I get there," he wrote to a friend, and "they chiefly respect the active functions of the body. To the mind I shall administer amusement chiefly. An only daughter and numerous family of grandchildren will furnish me great resources of happiness."[7] A snowstorm slowed his phaeton's procession from Washington, so Jefferson took off on horseback and arrived to Monticello on March 15.[8]

When he returned from his service as U.S. Minister to France in December 1789, Jefferson had been greeted by the enslaved at Monticello joyously. Upon leaving the presidency, he was greeted with more of a muted response.[9] The first occasion had been a show of relief of his survival as the enslaved had tragic knowledge and experience of just how perilous the transatlantic journey could be and what his continued health meant for the relative stability of their Black community. But in 1809, now that Jefferson had returned to Monticello to stay, the clock, as he would liken himself to, had begun to countdown.

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[6] Ibid., 655.
[7] Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, December 25, 1808, Charles Thomas Papers, Library of Congress. Quoted in Jon Meacham, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012), 439-440.
[8] Meacham, 441.
[9] For a discussion of Jefferson's 1789 return from France, see Gordon-Reed, 397-401, 644; for his 1809 return from the presidency, see Meacham, 440-441.

Jefferson spent the last seventeen years of his life in Virginia. Once Jefferson crossed the Potomac River into Virginia, he seems to have never again left the Commonwealth. Jefferson beat a path from Monticello to Charlottesville, to friends' homes, and to Poplar Forest, his Bedford County retreat, but he remained in Virginia where he embarked upon one of the most productive and most well-documented retirements in American history. He loved, he said, the "ineffable luxury of being owner of my own time."[10] During retirement, Jefferson founded the University of Virginia, read widely and maintained a massive correspondence, oversaw his farms, entertained scores of visitors and looked after his family. For himself and his white family, as well as guests he spared few, if any, expenses. This, compounded by the debt he had inherited from his father-in-law, and several poor financial decisions, led Jefferson into a financial morass. Jefferson would die with more than $107,000 in debt.[11]

The enslaved had long known that Jefferson's death meant devastation for them. The more daringly optimistic of them could look to the examples of Virginian enslavers, most notably Edward Coles, John White, and Jefferson's own kinsman Richard Randolph, who had emancipated significant numbers of enslaved people.[12] But despite verbal promises Jefferson made over the years to certain enslaved people, no one could be confident of their status or future. In November 1824, during Jefferson's emotional reunion with the Marquis de Lafayette, a

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[10] Jefferson to Charles Pinckney, 29 August 1809, *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-01-02-0380.

[11] For Jefferson's indebtedness, see Herbert Sloan, *Principle and Interest: Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Debt* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995); This an estimated $2,815,000 in 2021 dollars. See the CPI Inflation Calculator, officialdata.org.

[12] For Coles, see Kurt E. Leichtle and Bruce G. Carveth. *Crusade Against Slavery: Edward Coles, Pioneer of Freedom* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011); for White, see Christina Snyder, *Great Crossings: Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in the Age of Jackson* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 66; for Randolph, see Craig Swain, "Free Blacks of Israel Hill," *The Historical Marker Database,* 28 Feb 2010, revised 3 Feb 2020, https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=28041.

French visitor interviewed some of Jefferson's enslaved African Americans. The unnamed enslaved people told their interlocutor that they were "perfectly happy, that they were subject to no ill-treatment, that their tasks were very easy, and that they cultivated the lands of Monticello with the greater pleasure, because they were almost sure of not being torn away from them, to be transported elsewhere, so long as Mr. Jefferson lived."[13] Although the interviewer's questions were not revealed, the answers provided by the unnamed African Americans demonstrate their concern over what would befall them upon their aging enslaver's death.

An experience in October 1825 nearly killed Jefferson. Early that month, he hosted sculptor John H.I. Bowere, who intended to take a plaster cast of Jefferson's head for a life mask. Bowere applied the wet plaster to Jefferson's face and waited for it to dry. However, the plaster dried much more quickly than Bowere expected and began to smother the octogenarian Jefferson. Although he was unable to talk or breathe, he grasped a nearby chair and shook it to sound the alarm. His enslaved valet Burwell Colbert quickly attended Jefferson and alerted the incompetent and increasingly frantic Bowere. The two worked in tandem to pry the mask from off of Jefferson's face. As the former president later related to James Madison,

> [Bowere] was obliged to use freely the mallet and chisel to break it into pieces and cut off a piece at a time. These thumps of the mallet would have been sensible almost to a loggerhead [a sea turtle]. The family became alarmed, and he confused, till I was quite exhausted, and there became a real danger that the ears would separate from the head sooner than the plaster. I now bid adieu for ever to busts.[14]

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[13] Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825; or, Journal of a Voyage to the United States*, trans. John D. Godman (Philadelphia, PA: Carey and Lea, 1829), 219.
[14] Jefferson to James Madison, 18 October 1825, *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5602. For the event, see Randall, *Jefferson*, III, 540.

Jefferson was lucky to survive the ordeal. Like many of his contemporaries, Jefferson was aware of his own significance to the American story and, as this harrowing episode demonstrates, was more than willing to participate in the mythologizing prior to his death. In this case, "history" had almost killed him.

As he kept correspondents like Madison up to date with his missives, Jefferson documented his declining health in letters to other friends and family members. In a January 1826 letter to a friend in Richmond, Jefferson wrote

> [As to] the state of my health ... it is now 3. weeks since a re-ascerbation of my painful complaint [a severe attack of diarrhea and difficulty urinating] has confined me to the house and indeed to my couch. required to be constantly recumbent I write slowly and with difficulty. yesterday for the 1st time I was able to leave the house and to resume a posture which enables me to begin to answer the letters which have been accumulating.[15]

Despite the physical challenges and the pain of compounding illnesses, Jefferson demonstrated his continued willingness not only to keep a record of his goings-on but also to engage with correspondents. Ever active and willing to experiment, Jefferson discovered he could ride his horse Eagle with a minimum amount of pain if he stationed Eagle on a terrace below and lowered himself into the saddle.[16] He insisted on riding a horse for several hours every day around his property, circumscribing a boundary around his enslaved. A false step, a bucking horse, a low limb, catching a common cold, anything could have ended his life. And the enslaved knew it. They noticed him stooping or slowing down, how during visits to them in the fields he

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[15] Jefferson to William Gordon, January 1, 1826, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/mtj1.055_0795_0795/.
[16] Randall, *Jefferson*, III, 539.

might use a campstool to sit and talk with them.[17] He might have been remarkably hale for an old man, but, nevertheless, he was an old man.

In January 1826, his beloved granddaughter Anne Cary Bankhead died just days after giving birth to a son. The tragedy must have reminded Jefferson of the deaths of his wife, Martha Wayles Jefferson, in 1782, and of their daughter, Maria Jefferson Eppes, in 1804. Dr. Robley Dunglison, the attending physician who witnessed Jefferson's shock over his granddaughter's demise, recorded that "it was impossible to imagine more poignant distress than was exhibited by him. He shed tears, and abandoned himself to every evidence of grief."[18] The following month, Jefferson learned that his crafty scheme to raise funds to cover his debts through a public lottery must include the house of Monticello itself.[19] The news stunned Jefferson, according to a witness, but he had to agree to the terms if he wished to pay his creditors.[20] He consented, but his plans for a lottery drawing—even with Monticello up for the raffle—would not come to pass. The failure of the lottery portended the destruction of dozens of enslaved families.

In between illness and personal loss, Jefferson considered his legacy. Writing to the slightly younger James Madison in February, Jefferson instructed him to "Take care of me when dead."[21] He prepared his will in mid-March, which included attending to a task he had long put off: manumitting his enslaved sons by Sally Hemings.[22] Aware of interest in the topic, Jefferson

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[17] For Jefferson's horseback riding into his old age and his visits to the enslaved in the fields, see his overseer Edmund Bacon's recollections in Hamilton W. Pierson, *The Private Life of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner, 1862), 70–84.
[18] Dunglison quoted in Sarah N. Randolph, *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, NY: Harper, 1871; reprinted Charlottesville, 1978), 416.
[19] John B. Boles, *Jefferson: Architect of American Liberty* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2017), 511-513.
[20] Ibid., 513.
[21] Jefferson to James Madison, 17 February 1826, *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5912.
[22] See Gordon-Reed, 647-649.

shielded his white family from further notoriety by ensuring that nothing about his relationship with Hemings or their children could be proven by the public paper trail.[23] Despite Jefferson's obfuscations, the descriptions in his will of his sons Eston and Madison, as well as their uncle John Hemings, reveal something of the Black family network as it then existed, and never again would, at Monticello.[24]

Jefferson became bedridden by early July. Dr. Dunglison wrote that "my worst apprehensions must soon be realized."[25] But visitors to Jefferson's bedchamber had the sense that he faced death with composure. To Henry Lee, who visited Jefferson only a week before his death, Jefferson had stated that death is "an event not to be desired, but not to be feared."[26] The dying patriarch composed a hauntingly beautiful poem and slipped it into a tiny box for his daughter Martha to read upon his death. It read:

> Life's visions are vanished, its dreams are no more;
> Dear friends of my bosom, why bathed in tears?
> I go to my fathers, I welcome the shore
> Which crowns all my hopes or which buries my cares.
> Then farewell, my dear, my lov'd daughter, adieu!
> The last pang of life is in parting from you!
> Two seraphs await me long shrouded in death;
> I will bear them your love on my last parting breath.[27]

Lying in his alcove bed surrounded by his white family and some members of the enslaved Hemings family who attended him, Jefferson's chief concern was time. It was then that he repeatedly asked those around him to assure him that it was July 4. Slipping in and out of

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Robley Dunglison to James Madison, 1 July 1826, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/mjm019792/.
[26] Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Visitors to Monticello* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 108-109.
[27] Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, 2 July 1826, *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-6184.

wakefulness, he seemed to be reliving the American Revolution. "Warn the committee to be on the alert," he said, referencing the Revolutionary Committee of Safety.[28] He lifted his right hand and gestured as if he were writing.[29] He may have been writing the Declaration of Independence. "In his last hours he was still struggling to defend the American cause, if only in his flickering imagination," Jon Meacham writes.[30]

Jefferson spoke his last words in the early morning of July 4 to the small retinue of enslaved African Americans who cared for him in his final hours.[31] He was unable to speak the rest of the day. At ten o'clock he attempted to wordlessly beckon a grandson to comfort him.[32] The grandson was confused, but the enslaved valet Burwell Colbert, who had saved Jefferson from death at least once before, interpreted his directive.[33] Colbert fixed Jefferson's pillow to elevate the patriarch's head.[34] The gesture completed the circle of Jefferson's life. His first memory was of being handed to an enslaved person on a pillow;[35] his last command, to be comforted in the throes of death, was carried out when his enslaved butler puffed a pillow on his death bed.[36] Thomas Jefferson died at ten minutes to one o'clock on Tuesday, July 4, 1826.[37]

Later in the afternoon of that fateful day, the church bells mournfully tolled in Charlottesville to mark Jefferson's death as the cannons boomed during the celebrations of

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[28] Randall, *Jefferson*, III, 546.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Meacham, 494.
[31] Randall, *Jefferson*, III, 543–4.
[32] Gordon-Reed, 651.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Susan Nicholas Randolph, *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson Compiled from Family Letters and Reminiseces of His Great-Granddaughter* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), 238.
[36] Meacham, 494.
[37] Randall, *Jefferson*, III, 545.

Independence Day.[38] In fact, due to the holiday, public commemorations of Jefferson's life began even before the vast swath of Americans learned of his passing. On the date of his death the Washington, D.C. *National Intelligencer* published a letter, subsequently reprinted in newspapers throughout the country and affixed to mourning ribbons distributed by the public,[39] that Jefferson had written in late June to inspire Americans to remember the Declaration of Independence.[40] Jefferson wrote:

> All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others. For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them.[41]

As Jefferson and John Adams both died on July 4, 1826, Americans remember the deaths of two Founders during "the great day of national jubilee," words spoken by Daniel Webster in an eulogy commemorating both men in Boston.[42] "In the very hour of public rejoicing," Webster said, "in the midst of echoing and reechoing voices of thanksgiving, while [Jefferson's and Adams's] own names were on all tongues, they took their flight together to the world of spirits."[43]

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[38] Alan Pell Crawford, *Twilight at Monticello: The Final Years of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, NY: Random House, 2009), 242.
[39] One surviving example of this mourning ribbon with Jefferson's last public letter printed on it can be found in the Political History Collections, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
[40] Ibid., 246.
[41] Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman, 24 June 1826 in ed. Merrill Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York, NY: Library of America, 2011), 1517.
[42] Daniel Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1903) I, 289.
[43] Ibid.

More than sixty years later, Peter Fossett, an aged Baptist preacher in Cincinnati, Ohio, reflected on the deaths of Adams and Jefferson. Fossett, who was enslaved as a child at Monticello and sold after his enslaver's death, said that on July 4, 1826, "sorrow came not only to the homes of two great men…but to the slaves of Thomas Jefferson."[44] For members of Jefferson's white family, his death was the passing of an era. For his enslaved people, it was the point of no return. Jefferson's death upended the entire world he had so carefully curated for himself at Monticello. If any African American had harbored the distant hope that Jefferson would have a deathbed conversion and free the enslaved, it did not occur.

For his entire adult life, Jefferson tried to keep his family as close to Monticello as he could.[45] These connections sustained a kind of dream world where, regardless of what occurred beyond Monticello plantation, whites and Blacks lived within the enslaver-enslaved paradigm in "orchestrated scenes of domestic tranquility," as Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf write.[46] At his death the ordered world came crashing down, and the fiction was revealed for what it was. Previously, Jefferson's white family could pretend that their patriarch's finances weren't in such dire straits, that they might all emerge from financial disaster unscathed, that their property would remain within their family. Ellen Randolph, writing in 1819 after receiving news of her grandfather's mounting financial difficulties, prayed that after struggles with "with debt &

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[44] "Once the Slave of Thomas Jefferson…," *New York World*, 30 January 1898. For a transcript of the article see "Recollections of Peter Fossett," *Monticello.org,* https://www.monticello.org/slavery/slave-memoirs-oral-histories/recollections-of-peter-fossett/.
[45] Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf, *"Most Blessed of the Patriarchs": Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2016), 35.
[46] Ibid., 265.

difficulty, we may be reserved as another proof of the capriciousness of fortune."[47] For anyone who had been led to believe in this fiction, the reality was severely revealed.

How word of Jefferson's death circulated from his chambers to the ears of the enslaved people across the plantation is unknown. But they learned Jefferson had not had a deathbed conversion from enslaver to liberator. He had not freed them en masse. He did no such thing, and the enslaved community's worst fears were confirmed. They now would forever know him to be one who never did live up to his most famous of declarations.

In the immediate wake of Jefferson's death, the actions of only a handful of Monticello's enslaved people are known. The enslaved carpenter John Hemings made his enslaver's coffin.[48] Unlike Hemings's masterworks, including much of the joinery and some of the furniture in Monticello, the coffin he made for Jefferson was a private work. No one besides himself and the few who gathered for Jefferson's funeral would ever see it. Sally Hemings took eyeglasses, an inkwell, and a shoe buckle to remember him by.[49] These were items that may have been weighted with meaning. And, in the Jefferson family graveyard, the enslaved gardener Wormley Hughes dug Jefferson's grave between that of his wife Martha and daughter Maria, the "two seraphs" mentioned in his deathbed poem, for the burial on July 5.[50]

As the mourners gathered around the burial ground their own individual mortalities could not have been far from their minds. Some of the mourners would be buried in the same graveyard years later. Andrew K. Smith's account of the burial, recounted nearly fifty years

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[47] Ellen Randolph to Martha Jefferson Randolph, 11 August 1819, *Family Letters*. For a transcript, see https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/826#X3184701.
[48] Gordon-Reed, *Hemingses*, 652.
[49] Ibid., 374-375.
[50] Meacham, 495.

afterward, puts the number of graveside mourners at thirty or forty.[51] But, given how many enslaved African Americans lived at Monticello, Smith's estimate almost certainly only refers to the number of whites gathered. Most of the white mourners would have been Jefferson's relatives and local friends. If there were enslaved people present, they would have seen approximately thirty or forty whites, some of whom they'd known all their lives, mourning their patriarch during a simple ceremony. The Reverend Frederick Hatch read the burial office from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer.[52] But as the ceremony concluded, a throng of 1,500 Charlottesville citizens, the single largest crowd to gather at Monticello until after it was turned into a museum nearly one century later, belatedly clambered up the little mountain to attend the ceremony.[53] Jefferson's son-in-law, Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., and his grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, each of whom knew a large procession was on its way for the funeral and had assumed the other one would tell Reverend Hatch, had said nothing during the service.[54] The throng was disappointed and reportedly angry to have missed the burial and thus the opportunity to pay their last respects to their most famous fellow citizen.[55] Among this crowd of 1,500 likely were some whites interested in getting a close look, perhaps a buyer's initial inspection, at Jefferson's enslaved people. For the enslaved would soon be sold.

In an attempt to settle Jefferson's estate, Jefferson's white descendants organized a public auction of the enslaved families and would eventually put Monticello up for sale. On January 15,

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[51] *Weekly Chronicle* (Charlottesville, VA), 15 October 1875. For a transcript, see https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/38.
[52] Meacham, 495.
[53] *Weekly Chronicle*, 15 October 1875.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

1827, the first day of an auction that lasted five days, 130 enslaved African Americans were put up for sale. An advertisement in the Charlottesville *Central Gazette* announced,

> the whole of the residue of the estate of Thomas Jefferson, dec., consisting of **130 VALUABLE NEGROES**, Stock, Crop, &c. Household and Kitchen Furniture. The attention of the public is earnestly invited to this property. The negroes are believed to be the most valuable for their number ever offered at one time in the State of Virginia.[56]

Among those auctioned was my ancestor Peter Hemings. He was 56 years old. Daniel Farley, his nephew, a free man, purchased him for $1 in one of several transactions that were anxiously arranged by free relatives and permitted by the Jefferson family.[57] One of the many others sold was the 11-year-old Peter Fossett, one of Hemings's grand-nephews and whom may have been his namesake. His father, Joseph Fossett, who knew he would be free on July 4, 1827, due to the terms of his manumission by Jefferson's will, asked local whites he knew to purchase his wife and their children until he could repay them.[58] Young Peter Fossett had sometimes worn a special blue suit with a red hat and red shoes, gifts from a free relative, that likely would have made him a colorful presence at Monticello prior to Jefferson's death.[59] His great uncle Peter Hemings, a tailor, would have been sure to notice him in that fine suit—he may have even tailored it for him. Now, on this blustery January day, the two Peters, and so many others, would be torn from each other. John R. Jones, who purchased Peter Fossett, reneged on the promise he made to Joseph Fossett and refused to sell Peter back.[60]

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[56] *Central Gazette* (Charlottesville, VA), 15 January 1827. For a reproduction, see https://www.monticello.org/slaveauction/.
[57] Gordon-Reed, 656.
[58] Ibid.
[59] *New York World*, 30 January 1898.
[60] Ibid.

Two years after the 1827 sale, in the second and last auction of Jefferson's enslaved people, this time conducted in front of the courthouse in downtown Charlottesville, a 13-year-old named Edmund Robinson stepped to the auction block. Thomas Jefferson Randolph purchased Robinson and his parents for himself.[61] I often wonder if Peter Hemings witnessed this second sale. After all, he plied his trade as a tailor in downtown Charlottesville. If he witnessed this second auction, he would have seen his future son-in-law on the auction block. Some years later, Edmund Robinson would marry Peter Hemings's daughter Sally.[62] Their child Anderson Jefferson Robinson, born enslaved in 1850, was my grandmother's grandfather.[63]

In the aftermath of Jefferson's death, there were significant deviations in how his enslaved people and their descendants experienced the last two generations of slavery. My ancestors, who were sold at the two auctions of Monticello's enslaved peoples, continued to be enslaved in their home region of central Virginia. They were not freed like some of the Hemingses who eventually relocated to Ohio a decade later, but neither were they forcibly transported to plantations in the Deep South. Those who were forced South to Alabama or Southwest to Missouri not only experienced the unspeakable loss of family separation but also the profound challenges of large-scale cotton farming. Many of the survivors of the Second Middle Passage, when an estimated 1 million enslaved people were forcibly transported from the Upper South to the Lower South in the decades before the Civil War, were subjected to the hardships of sharecropping throughout the rest of the nineteenth and into the twentieth

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[61] Monticello dispersal sale receipts, University of Virginia, MS 5921. For a reproduction of the 1829 dispersal sale receipt with Edmund Robinson's and his parents' (James and Rachel's) first names' listed among the sold, see https://www.monticello.org/slaveauction/img/Eagle-Hotel-1829sale-1.jpg.

[62] 1870 U.S. Census, Charlottesville, VA.

[63] Anderson Robinson's gravestone in the Robinson Family Burial Ground, Goochland, VA, lists his birth year as 1850.

centuries.[64] The dispersal sales of 1827 and 1829 had profound intergenerational effects on Monticello's African American families.

"[African Americans'] griefs are transient," Jefferson had written in the *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785).[65] Jefferson's writings about Black grief may have served to assuage any guilt he felt over separating hundreds of people from one another during his own lifetime, and the great scattering of enslaved families that would transpire after his death. He could not account for how African Americans would remember him, but he could and did work to create and promulgate a racist body of knowledge that negatively influenced perceptions of people of African descent. *Notes on the State of Virginia* was the most popular nonfiction book in America until the mid-nineteenth century.[66] Jefferson, the architect of American independence, articulated a racist discourse about Black people that thoroughly permeated America's collective consciousness. But whatever Jefferson did to try to convince himself and the innumerable others who took his racist words literally, he could not control how he would be remembered after his death.

For example, in 1847 the 72-year-old blacksmith Isaac Granger Jefferson commented that, "Old master [Jefferson] never dat handsome in dis world," in reaction to the likeness of Thomas Jefferson, his late enslaver, printed in William Linn's *The Life of Thomas Jefferson*

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[64] For details about Monticello-connected families who were forcibly transported to Alabama, see the interviews with families in North Courtland, Alabama in the Getting Word Archive, Charlottesville, VA; for details about families in Missouri, see Elizabeth Varon, "From Carter's Mountain to Morganza Bend," *Nau Center for Civil War History Blog*, 11 January 2017, http://naucenter.as.virginia.edu/usct_odyssey_part_1.

[65] Peterson, *Writings,* 265.

[66] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2016), 112.

(1839).[67] "Dat likeness," the talented blacksmith said as he scrutinized the book's frontispiece, is "right between old master and Ginral Washington."[68] Isaac Granger Jefferson knew both founding fathers, and judged Linn's portrait of "old master" Jefferson to be off its mark.

Jefferson obsessed over how he would be received in history. An undated manuscript in his hand that gave the design for an obelisk to mark his grave, eventually erected in 1833, indicated that he wished to be "most remembered" for being the author of the Declaration of American Independence and the statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and the father of the University of Virginia.[69] But he could not have imagined that the words of Black Americans would be as carefully analyzed as his own and that their representations of him as a paradoxical patriarch would largely shape the current popular and academic consensus of Jefferson. The opinions expressed by many African Americans from the nineteenth century onward reveal deeply ironic, critical, and consistent interpretations of Jefferson as the quintessential American paradox.

The date of Jefferson's death is strikingly coincidental with the origins of the radical abolitionist movement in the United States, which saw the widespread dissemination of antislavery accounts and was rooted in and expanded upon Jeffersonian natural rights philosophy. Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm's *Freedom's Journal* appeared in the spring of 1827; it was the nation's first Black newspaper, and some of its first articles concerned

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[67] Rayford W. Logan, ed., *Memoirs of a Monticello Slave: As Dictated to Charles Campbell in the 1840's by Isaac, one of Thomas Jefferson's Slaves* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1951), 16.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Thomas Jefferson, no date, *Epitaph*. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib024905/.

celebrations of Independence Day.[70] Many other abolitionist publications poured forth as Black and white Americans began to call for slavery's immediate end.[71] Black women were also crucial actors in this movement, as historian Martha Jones and others have shown. In 1832, Maria Stewart, a free Black woman in Connecticut, proclaimed "I am a true born American," and stated that "the whites have so long and so loudly proclaimed the theme of equal rights and privileges, that our souls have caught the flame also."[72] Abolitionists chose to embrace the natural rights tenets expressed in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence and worked to ensure equality between all Americans.

Frederick Douglass articulated the most notable broadsides to Jefferson's reputation with his 1852 speech "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro" (commonly known as "What, to the Slave, is the Fourth of July?"). "This Fourth July is yours, not mine," Douglass told his audience in Rochester, New York.[73] "You may rejoice, I must mourn."[74] Pro-slavery Americans could not be reasoned with, he said. "At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed." And then he hit his high note:

> What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and

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[70] Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*: *African Americans in New York City*, 1626-1863 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 123.
[71] Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020), 44.
[72] Maria W. Miller Stewart, "Lecture Delivered at Franklin Hall," 21 September 1832, *Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project*, http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/stewart-lecture-delivered-speech-text/.
[73] Philip S. Foner, ed. *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York, NY: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1950), TK.
[74] Ibid.

> solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception and impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour.[75]

Douglass would often use this framing in his jeremiads in the years leading to and during the Civil War. His "scorching irony" directed at Jefferson and the Founders was echoed by many fellow abolitionists, including Charlotte Forten who, in Philadelphia in 1857, recorded, "Went to Independence Hall.—The old bell with its famous inscription, the mottoes, the relics, the pictures of the heroes of the Revolution—the *saviours* of their country,—what a *mockery* they all seemed, —here there breathes not a freeman, black or white." [76] Jeffersonian legacies were never far from the minds of abolitionists.

But with the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency in 1860, southern secessionists—who had long been dismissive of the Jeffersonian ideal that "all men are created equal"—claimed for themselves the mantle of the right to revolution enshrined in Jefferson's Declaration. The Confederacy abhorred Lincoln, who himself selectively interpreted Jefferson for the preservation of the Union. The Confederate army, which claimed Monticello for itself in 1862, included several white Jefferson descendants, including some of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren who had been present for his 1826 funeral. Thomas Jefferson Randolph, who had orchestrated the dispersal sales of 1827 and 1829, was named a Confederate colonel.

In 1864, with the Confederacy in its death throes, Frederick Douglass delivered a speech, "The Mission of the War," in which he plainly laid out his vision of the future of the United States. "What we now want is a country—a free country," said Douglass, "a country not

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*: *African American Women and Emancipation in an Antebellum City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 149.

saddened by the footprints of a single slave—and nowhere cursed by the presence of a slaveholder. We want a country which shall not brand the Declaration of Independence as a lie."[77] As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes, "For Douglass, black Americans were the true patriots, because they fully embraced Jeffersonian democracy; they were the most Jeffersonian Americans of all.... Here was Jefferson, whom Douglass called 'the sage of the Old Dominion,' cast as the patron saint of the black freedom struggle."[78] Among those serving in the Union, including several grandsons of Jefferson and Sally Hemings (some serving as white, others as Black), were perhaps dozens of men whose parents and grandparents had been enslaved by Jefferson and his relatives. Those soldiers, descendants of people enslaved by Jefferson, were fighting to make the United States live up to Jefferson's words.

Black Americans cast the Emancipation Proclamation and the Declaration of Independence "into the same seamless story," as David Blight writes.[79] In January 1865 at the AME Bethel Church in New Haven, Connecticut, the Reverend S.D. Berry declared the Emancipation Proclamation to be the Union's Declaration of Independence.[80] Berry reminded his parishioners that, as Americans, they were the descendants—literally as well as figuratively— of the heroes of the American Revolution. "As our forefathers fought, bled, and conquered for the Declaration of Independence," declared Berry, "just so hard are we now fighting for the Emancipation Proclamation."[81] As Blight notes, a celebration at another AME church on the

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[77] Frederick Douglass, "The Mission of the War," 13 January 1864. See the full transcription of the speech at https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1864-frederick-douglass-mission-war/.
[78] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's First Black Poet and her Encounters with the Founding Fathers* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003), 26.
[79] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 28.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

same day, but this time in Chester, Illinois, was perhaps even more patriotic: "Similar to New Haven, the Chester celebration ended with a resolution to carry on the war for the 'principles' in the Proclamation and the Declaration, including a recitation of Thomas Jefferson's preamble."[82] Before the war had ended, "blacks were preparing the script and forging the arguments for a long struggle over the memory of the events they were living through."[83] Thomas Jefferson's words had played a key role in their war effort.

Following the Union's victory in the Civil War, Jefferson's reputation suffered for the remainder of the nineteenth century. Jefferson was viewed as an advocate of secession and slavery, a proto-Confederate, and understood to have been partly to blame for the factors that caused the Civil War.[84] Among the Civil War dead was Thomas Eston Hemings, the grandson of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, who is said to have died at the notorious prison in Andersonville, South Carolina.[85]

Thirty-five years after the war's end, an elderly man made an improbable return to the home of his youth. The 85-year-old Peter Fossett, who had once worn a striking blue suit before being sold away from his family in 1827, visited Monticello in June 1900.[86] Fossett had managed to escape slavery in 1850 and relocated to Cincinnati where he became a Baptist minister; his church raised funds for him to fulfill his longtime wish of returning to visit Monticello.[87] The Levy family, who had purchased the home in 1834 and had it returned to them following the

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Francis D. Cogliano, *Thomas Jefferson: Reputation & Legacy* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 4.
[85] *Pike County* (Ohio) *Republican*, 13 March 1873.
[86] "WAS JEFFERSON'S SLAVE – Rev. P. F. Fossett Visits the Scenes of His Youth," *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, 13 June 1900.
[87] Ibid.

Confederacy's seizure of it during the Civil War, welcomed Fossett to Monticello at the main entrance.[88] He reflected on the dispersal sales that had torn his family and so many others apart. "Then began our troubles," he told a newspaper reporter two years before his visit. "We were scattered all over the country, never to meet each other again until we meet in another world."[89]

At the turn of the twentieth century, it may have seemed impossible for Peter Fossett to imagine an earthly reunion of those affected by slavery and the dispersal sales following Jefferson's death. Glorious visions for a country that, as Frederick Douglass had said, "would not brand the Declaration of Independence a lie," gave way to a powerful nation that, after several decades, had largely reunited through white supremacy and segregation.[90] Jim Crow laws restricted African Americans' lives throughout the United States. Peter Fossett was living during an epoch between the abandonment of Reconstruction and World War I that Rayford Logan called the "nadir" of race relations in the United States.[91] In Fossett's mind, time would continue to pass, and old associations would be forgotten, ignored, and erased. But pioneering historians in the late twentieth century made Fossett's hoped-for reunion a reality for people whose ancestors were affected by the dispersal sales to cover Jefferson's debts. This work has had profound implications and continues to inspire hope in the deeply divided country Jefferson helped to found nearly 250 years ago.

Modern interpreters of Jefferson do not revise history so much as they seek to restore and interpret perspectives that were cast aside during the period of the institutionalization of

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[88] Ibid.
[89] *New York World,* 30 January 1898.
[90] Many historians point to the Spanish-American War, when Northerners and Southerners, including some veterans of the Civil War, came together to fight a new war. See TK.
[91] Rayford Logan, *The Negro in Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York, NY: Dial Press, 1954).

Jefferson's reputation. In the mid-1910s, a group of well-connected Americans sought to elevate Jefferson into the national pantheon. Their efforts culminated in purchasing Monticello from the Levy family and the establishment of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation in 1923 (renamed the Thomas Jefferson Foundation in 2000). On April 13, 1943, the 200th anniversary of Jefferson birth, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a great admirer of Jefferson, laid the cornerstone and dedicated the Jefferson Memorial to the founder he coined the "apostle of freedom"[92]— and chose to feature Jefferson's profile and Monticello's West Lawn façade on the nickel.[93] To this day, anytime someone looks at the obverse of the nickel, they are looking not only at the seat of the Jefferson family but also a representation of the exact site where, after Jefferson's death, 130 human beings were forcibly sold away from their loved ones.

The canonization of Jefferson as the "apostle of freedom" obscured the civil rights activism of descendants of Monticello's enslaved families who, as Lucia Stanton writes, fought "to make this country live up to the promise of its founding document."[94] Among this extended community, Stanton has identified "a remarkable number of men and women who were crusaders, often on the front lines" in civil rights movements.[95] Frederick Madison Roberts, Coralie Franklin Cook, and William Monroe Trotter are the best-known activist descendants of Elizabeth Hemings, the matriarch of the Hemings family. Roberts, a Californian, became the first African American elected to office in any state west of the Mississippi; Cook, the first identified Monticello-connected descendant to graduate from college, helped found the National Association of Colored Women (NACW); and Trotter, a graduate of Harvard University, and to

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[92] Cogliano, 5.
[93] Ibid., 6.
[94] Stanton, *"Those Who Labor for My Happiness,* 282.
[95] Ibid.

this day the best-known descendant of the Monticello enslaved community, helped found the Niagara Movement, a forerunner of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP), and was an indefatigable and formidable activist for decades.[96] These individuals, Stanton writes, "believed in the truth of the Declaration's preamble, cherished the hope that it would one day be more than an ideal, and joined with, and often led, countless other African Americans in the cause."[97] These Monticello-connected leaders, who were themselves influenced by radical abolitionists, had successors in the Civil Rights Movement. As Peggy Trotter Dammond Preacely, the activist grandniece of William Monroe Trotter, writes, "it was simply in my blood."[98] When Preaceley's and others' work is considered with their predecessors in mind, a genealogy of activism emerges from the historical record.

If Jefferson's actions cast hundreds of people deeper into the perils of slavery, his words would still be used to advance the cause of human freedom. As Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the crowd gathered for his "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963, he quoted from Jefferson's Declaration of Independence:

> When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men—yes, black men as well as white men—would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds. But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this

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[96] Stanton, 286; 290; 297-299.
[97] Ibid., 282.
[98] Peggy Trotter Dammond Preaceley, "It Was Simply In My Blood," in Faith S. Holsaert et al., eds., *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 163-172.

> nation. And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.[99]

The crowd at the March on Washington included several descendants of Monticello's enslaved people. The elderly grandchildren of the Robinsons—Edmund who had been sold at age 13; Sally whose father Peter Hemings had been sold to his nephew for $1 in 1827—were among those in attendance.[100] In 2011, nearly a half century after the March on Washington, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial was unveiled on the Tidal Basin; it permanently fixes King looking in the direction of the Jefferson Memorial. It is no exaggeration to say that long after Jefferson's death, descendants of the enslaved—including many descendants of people Jefferson enslaved himself—have served as sentinels in advancing democracy.

As the nation's Bicentennial approached, American writers and historians sought to publicly reinterpret the hagiographic image of Jefferson and the Founders. In 1972 at The College of William & Mary, the very institution Jefferson had graduated from nearly two centuries before, the acclaimed writer Ralph Ellison delivered a stirring Commencement speech that called to mind the flaws and ideals of both Jefferson and the United States:

> As surely as the values stated in our sacred documents were compelling and all-pervasive and as surely as they were being made a living reality in the social structure, such people as were excluded from the rewards and promises of that social structure would rise up and insist on being included. Such people as were brutalized and designated a role beneath the social hierarchy were sure to rise up, and with the same rhetoric and in the name of the same sacred principles, accuse the nation and insist upon a rectification.[101]

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[99] Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream," 28 August 1963. See full text at https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety.

[100] See Annette Gordon-Reed's interview with Velma Williams in "Monticello Virtual Independence Day Commemoration," 4 July 2020, *Thomas Jefferson's Monticello*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MRN1HzYlBg.

[101] Ralph Ellison, "Commencement Address at the College of William & Mary," in John F. Callahan, ed., *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (New York, NY: Random House, 1995), 415.

Ellison described the crucial appropriation of the Founders' words that had led to, and would continue to lead to, an extension of Jefferson's founding ideas despite his refusal or inability to do so himself. Ellison charged his audience to "not bury the past, because it is within us…And because of this we are now able to resuscitate in all its boldness, and with great sophistication, that conscious and conscientious concern for others which is the essence of the American ideal."[102] Nearly a century and a half after his death, Jefferson's words were not only being remembered but were being reinvigorated.

Other writers sought to correct the record about Jefferson's personal life, especially regarding his decades-long relationship with Sally Hemings. Fawn Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (1974) proved the most controversial. Brodie had a deep interest in uncovering the truths of his relationship with Sally Hemings. Her methods were years ahead of their time. Barbara Chase-Riboud's best-selling novel *Sally Hemings* (1979) was based on Brodie's research. For decades, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation dismissed the Hemings story and downplayed the contributions of hundreds of African Americans enslaved over the generations at Monticello, but the Brodie biography and the Chase-Riboud novel carried word into the last two decades of the twentieth century. Interestingly, numerous descendants of Monticello's enslaved community would attest to the influence the biography and novel had on all but confirming their families' oral traditions.

To borrow and recontextualize a phrase from Merrill Peterson, among the most important things to happen since Jefferson's death are the founding of the Getting Word African American Oral History Project and Annette Gordon-Reed's groundbreaking scholarship on Jefferson and the Hemingses. Getting Word was founded by historians Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-

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[102] Ibid., 416.

Wright in 1993, the 250th anniversary of Jefferson's birthday, with the intention to locate the descendants of Monticello's enslaved population, and to record their family stories and histories.[103] The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (now Virginia Humanities) initially funded Stanton's idea. Stanton hired Swann-Wright, then a doctoral student at the University of Virginia, to be her partner on the as-of-yet unnamed project.

Swann-Wright felt the title of their project embodied how descendants of Jefferson's enslaved families "get word" to one another across generations. After conducting dozens of interviews over the next four years, Stanton and Swann-Wright hosted the Getting Word Gathering, a weekend of events at Monticello in June 1997.[104] The Gathering "marked the first coming together of different African American families, all descendants of Thomas Jefferson's enslaved community."[105] More than 100 guests, including participants in Getting Word and their families, traveled from eight states (and the District of Columbia) for the homecoming.[106]

Exactly 170 years after 130 enslaved people were sold on Monticello's West Lawn, many of their descendants gathered at the very same spot. Descendants, many meeting for the first time, laughed and hugged one another, and celebrated their homecoming. They also mourned those who had gone before them. Stanton and Swann-Wright had organized a naming ceremony, "to acknowledge those who were unable to leave lasting records of their existence."[107] Small cards, each imprinted with the name of a person enslaved at Monticello, were placed in a handmade white oak basket. Everyone at the gathering took a name from the basket and, "one by

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[103] Stanton, "Request for Funding," (grant proposal, International Center for Jefferson Studies, 1993), 1.
[104] *Getting Word: The Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1997): 1.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright, "Bonds of Memory: Identity and the Hemings Family," in Stanton, "*Those Who Labor for My Happiness,"* 249-250.

one, descendants called out the names of those who had gone before." By chance, "a tow-headed ten-year-old," fifth-great granddaughter of Sally Hemings, bore in her hand a card with the name of her ancestor. She said the name aloud.[108]

On the very day Getting Word families were gathered at Monticello, the world was getting word from the *New York Times* that Annette Gordon-Reed had ushered in a sea change for reinterpreting Jefferson and American history. Gordon-Reed's *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (1997) had just been published by University of Virginia Press. Gordon-Reed made it clear that generations of historians, wittingly or unwittingly, ignored or overlooked evidence that Thomas Jefferson fathered children with Sally Hemings. "I'm not saying that all these people are racist and that they hate blacks," Gordon-Reed told the *Times*.[109] "No. I think that the response to this story is the legacy of slavery. This is absolutely the way people have been taught to think whether they consciously know it or not, of devaluing black people's words when they are inconvenient."[110] Gordon-Reed reinterpreted historical evidence and persuasively argued that Thomas Jefferson was the father of all of Sally Hemings's children, and would go on to write the National Book Award-winning classic *The Hemingses of Monticello* which further contextualized the lives of many of Monticello's enslaved families and presented some of what was forced upon them in the aftermath of Jefferson's death.

By emphasizing and interpreting the perspectives of African Americans from the 18th century to the present, Stanton, Swann-Wright, and Gordon-Reed contributed to a revolution in Jeffersonian scholarship. Their work, and the work of other scholars, has had enormous

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Daryl Royster Alexander, "Looking Beyond Jefferson the Icon To a Man and His Slave Mistress," *New York Times,* June 29, 1997.
[110] Ibid.

implications not only for understanding Jefferson and the Hemingses, but also, especially in the case of Stanton's research, the wider community of Monticello's enslaved African Americans and their descendants. Stanton and Swann-Wright's Getting Word Project has helped reconstitute dozens of African American families, many of whom can trace their dispersal from Monticello to the dispersal sales that occurred following Jefferson's death. The research of these scholars, as well as the Charlottesville-born historian Niya Bates and the writer Gayle Jessup White who have followed in their footsteps, honors "the intimacy of the enslaved community" and their descendants, as Christina Sharpe has written, who live in the wake of slavery.[111] Begun as a project to learn more about Black families' oral histories of slavery, Getting Word has since become an important archive of Black freedom, collecting and preserving dozens of families' histories from the era of slavery to the present.

In June 2018, at the 25th anniversary of the founding of Getting Word, 300 descendants of people enslaved by Jefferson, including myself, my grandmother and five of her first cousins, gathered at Monticello. Annette Gordon-Reed and Lucia Stanton were present, and Dianne Swann-Wright, who, sadly, had passed away six months before, was honored by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. When the Getting Word reunion festivities ended on that night in June 2018, our shuttle bus descended from the mountaintop and paused briefly at Jefferson's gravesite. The nightfall obscured the obelisk that marks Jefferson's resting place in the Monticello Graveyard. No one on our shuttle—comprised of descendants of the many families Jefferson enslaved, including the Herns, Hubbards, Gillettes, Grangers and others—asked to stop

[111] Christina Sharpe, interview by Siddhartha Mitter, "What Does It Mean to Be Black and Look at This?" *Hyperallergic*, 24 March 2017, https://hyperallergic.com/368012/what-does-it-mean-to-be-black-and-look-at-this-a-scholar-reflects-on-the-dana-schutz-controversy/.

to disembark at the graveyard. Instead, we promised each other that in the morning we would visit the Burial Ground for Enslaved People, where so many ancestors are buried, to leave flowers and pray.