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Email us at KWU360@HOTMAIL.COM

Jefferson and Hemmings: Lust or Love?

By Kamau Davis

"I advance it, therefore, as a suspicion only, that the Blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstance, are **inferior** to the whites in the endowments of body and mind."

Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia

Thomas Jefferson, writer of the Declaration of Independence and one of the framers of the Constitution of the United States (U.S) wrote, with supreme intellect into the nature of freedom for himself and his fellow countrymen, essays of how Britain's American colonists were "slaves" of the king of Britain and should "free" themselves of Britain's oppressive rulership. At the same time, Jefferson himself owned more than two hundred enslaved Africans against their will.

One in particular, Sally (or Sarah) Hemmings, has become important in the last few months as White scholars and historians have finally admitted that Jefferson had a sexual relationship with her. Many Black historians already conceded that Jefferson had an extensive sexual relationship with Hemmings, but of course in White academe, Black documentation of historical events are meaningless until they are "affirmed" by White historians.

Just as Jefferson, his father-in-law indulged himself in the "pleasure" of taking advantage of enslaved Black women. Jefferson's father-in-law was married but at the same time maintained sexual relations with enslaved Black women. Thus he had daughters from his marriage and his affairs, Hemmings the product of the affair, Martha (Jefferson's wife) the product of the marriage. So when Jefferson's father-in-law died, Hemmings, her mother, and other enslaved Africans became Jefferson's property. Hemmings was about 3 years old at the time. Six years later Jefferson's wife Martha died, leaving his children (by Martha) to look after him. Hemmings became a nursemaid to Jefferson's daughter Maria, which placed her in more contact with Jefferson.

In 1784 Jefferson left for Paris. When his younger daughter died, the distraught Jefferson sent for Maria. He also wanted Sally to accompany her. In France Sally stayed with Jefferson and it was here that Jefferson began making advances towards Hemmings. When Jefferson wanted to return to the U.S., Hemmings refused because she wanted to start a life in Paris where slavery was outlawed. So Jefferson offered an agreement to her that if she returned to the United States with him she would have privileges. She agreed. After her return to the U.S. Hemmings bore six children by Jefferson, four of which lived to adulthood. Jefferson agreed to free these children from bondage when they reached 21 years of age and as he agreed, when they reached 21 Hemmings' son Beverly and daughter Harriet left the plantation to live as White people. Jefferson would free Madison and Eston upon his death. However, Hemmings was not granted freedom in his will, she only received informal freedom by her children after his death. But the question remains; was it Jefferson's lust that led to his relationship with Hemmings or were they "in love"? The fact that he was White and 46 years old in colonial times and Hemmings was Black and only 16 years old should preclude any further discussion of this topic. However, as shown earlier in this essay, Jefferson believed that Blacks were genetically and biologically inferior to Whites. Furthermore he believed that Blacks and Whites could not and should not coexist as equals in American society.

Just as many slave masters degraded Blackness as an acceptable or beautiful quality, many of those same white men crept into the slave quarters in the middle of the night to force themselves on their Black female "properties" regardless of their age. A former enslaved man named Robert Smalls stated that for any master or his sons to be seen or known (by other Whites) to have had intercourse with an enslaved Black female was disgraceful, yet slavemasters like Jefferson chose to do so anyway. *see Jefferson p. 2*

Infinite History

by "The Conscious One" aka Bobby Seale

Before we begin to celebrate black history month and try to prove to others that we have contributed something to civilization, we must take a more critical look at ourselves and our actions. Through the misrepresentation of history, African-Americans have gained an inferiority complex, one that makes us look outside ourselves for approval. Some of us are still waiting to be legitimized by those that despise us, others are trying to "whiten" their souls to appear more appealing to the masses while still others are suffering from their lack of social, economic, and psychological independence.

The African holocaust (trans-Atlantic slave trade) was not a crime; it was a legal institution protected by law, only to be destroyed by the 13th amendment to the constitution, which made owning slaves illegal. But even after that African Americans were not completely free. Aside from discrimination there were countless laws known as 'Black Codes' that hindered our economic and political progress, keeping us subordinate to the influence of larger white society. *see History p.2*

History cont. Every decision, no matter how insignificant or trivial, was made after taking into account larger society's response or reaction. And while physical aspects of this holocaust are gone; Black Codes, etc., the psychological effects are still prevalent. It has been 100 years since the end of the African holocaust and we still have not come to the realization or the consciousness that we are equal to other great civilizations. This mental form of slavery has dwarfed our motivation, perception, and aspiration. It has also simplified the existence of spirituality and nullified the purpose of the soul. As Carter G. Woodson states in his book The Mis-Education of the Negro, "If you control a mans mind, you don't have to worry about his actions."

Let's fast forward to February 1999 when we will celebrate black history in much the same way we worship on Sunday morning; February will be the only time many of us embrace our culture just as going to church is the only time many of us remember we are Christian. February has become the time when we want to be called by our African names, we find it aesthetically pleasing to bring out our Kente cloths, dig out our African artifacts, all while proving to our co-workers that we are Pro-Black but non-threatening at the same time. Our actions show that we as African-Americans are still behaving subordinately to larger white society just like our ancestors.

Know thy self, accept thy self, love thy self. These are the key elements in building a truer foundation of African-American history and culture. It is time that we use this month to redefine our culture without the help or approval of larger, white society. Although we as different races and cultures can peacefully co-exist, our existence should not be dictated by those outside our culture. It is ours and we are free to express it in the way we see fit. We should not have to worry, let alone think about someone else's reaction to our action. We as African-Americans can celebrate our culture everyday, free of restraints instead of under someone else's conditions or time limitations. When we do this we will be free in body and mind, infinitely.

Jefferson cont. Sally Hemmings sacrificed her Black body for the sake of freedom for her children. It was one of millions of sacrifices that Black women made to maintain our people and our families. Sally Hemmings knew that the only way she would be able to break the chains of bondage for her family would be to accept the bargain Jefferson presented to her, and have faith that he would uphold his end of it. In that manner, the sexual relationship between Jefferson and Hemmings may not have been one where Jefferson had to force himself on her. However, my belief is that Sally Hemmings would not have entered this relationship voluntarily without that bargain.

The Righteous One's aka Huey Newton's Poetry Selections out of respect for Black History (Month)

Another February has come around which means that people everywhere will be aesthetically taking part in the rituals that accompany "Black History Month". McDonalds will be airing commercials "honoring" Black History, as will Budweiser and probably General Motors. Ironically these same businesses have in one way or another contributed to stagnation and complacency that plagues Americans today. And when February passes, these commercials won't air again until next February. So one must ask, whose interests are these companies protecting by airing these commercials? If they were protecting yours they would do more than air a commercial, they would be pumping money into the Black community or investing in Black business in some way or another. Black History Month has become a commercialized, aesthetically pleasing, artificial celebration of a tradition so rich in achievement, culture, and pride that to even think that a commercial or some sort of two hour celebration is enough to honor it is an insult to every Black person or person of African descent (all of us)! So I have selected a couple poems that will bring this time of year back to its essence, or at least one aspect of it. At the same time, we at 360 feel as though we have been too compromising in our ideas, theories, and so forth. Thus these poems serve as our wake-up call and a reminder why we began writing 360 in the first place.

To the White Friends by Claude McKay

Think you I am not fiend and savage too?
Think you I could not arm me with a gun
And shoot down ten of you for every one
Of my black brothers murdered, burnt by you?
Be not deceived, for every deed you do
I could match- out match: am I not Afric's son,
Black of that black land where black deeds are done?
But the Almighty from the darkness drew
My soul and said: Even thou shalt be a light
Awhile to burn on the benighted earth,
Thy dusky face I set among the white
For thee to prove thyself of higher worth;
Before the world is swallowed up in night,
To show thy little lamp: go forth, go forth!

BLACK ART by AMIRI BARAKA

Poems are bullshit unless they are
teeth or trees or lemons piled
on a step. Or black ladies dying
of men leaving nickel heart
beating them down. Fuck poems
and they are useful, wd they shoot
come at you, love what you are
breathe like wrestlers. or shudder

strangely after pissing. We want live
words of the hip world live fresh &
coursing blood. Hearts Brains
Souls splintering fire. We want poems
like the fists beating niggers out of jocks
or dagger poems in the slimy bellies
of the owner-jew. Black poems to
smear on girdlemamma mulatto bitches
whose brains are red jelly stuck
between 'lizabeth taylor's toes. Stinking
Whores! We want "poems that kill".
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
and take their weapons leaving them dead
with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland.
Knockoff poems for dope selling wops or slick
half white politicians Airplane poems, rrrrrrrr
rrrrrrr... tuhtuhtuhtuhtuhtuh tuhtuhtuh
.....rrrrr.....Setting fire and death to
whities ass. Look at the Liberal
Spokesman for the jews clutch his throat
& puke himself into eternity...rrrrr
There's a negroleader pinned to
a bar stool in Sardi's eyeball melting
in hot flame Another negro leader

kneeling between the sheriiff's thighs
negotiating coolly for his people
Aggh... stumbles across the room..
Put it on him, poem. Strip him naked
to the world!
Another bad poem cracking
steel knuckles in a jewlady's mouth
Poem scream poison gas
on the beasts in green berets
clean out the world for virtue and love,
Let there be no love poems written
until love can exist freely and
cleanly. Let Black People understand
that they are the lovers and the sons
of lovers and warriors and sons
of warriors Are poems & poets &
all the loveliness here in the world

We want a black poem. And a
Black World.
Let the world be a Black Poem
And Let All Black People Speak This
Poem
Silently
or LOUD