THE HEMINGSES of MONTICELLO
ALSO BY ANNETTE GORDON-REED

Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy

Vernon Can Read!: A Memoir (with Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.)

Race on Trial: Law and Justice in American History (editor)
THE HEMINGSES of MONTICELLO

AN AMERICAN FAMILY

ANNETTE GORDON-REED

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON
TO MY HUSBAND, ROBERT REED, AND OUR DAUGHTER, SUSAN JEAN GORDON REED, AND OUR SON, GORDON PENN REED
CONTENTS

Chronology of the Hemings Family

Preface

INTRODUCTION

PART I

ORIGINS

1 Young Elizabeth's World

2 John Wayles: The Immigrant

3 The Children of No One

4 Thomas Jefferson

5 The First Monticello

6 In the Home of a Revolutionary

PART II

The Vaunted Scene of Europe

7 “A Particular Purpose”

8 James Hemings: The Provincial Abroad

9 “Isabel or Sally Will Come”

10 Dr. Sutton

11 The Rhythms of the City

12 The Eye of Revolution

13 “During That Time”

14 Sarah Hemings: The Fatherless Girl in a Patriarchal Society

15 The Teenagers and the Woman

16 “His Promises, on Which She Implicitly Relied”

17 “The Treaty” and “Did they Love Each Other?”
18 The Return

Part III

On the Mountain

19 Hello and Goodbye

20 Equilibrium

21 The Brothers

22 Philadelphia

23 Exodus

24 The Second Monticello

25 Into the Future, Echoes from the Past

26 The Ocean of Life

27 The Public World and the Private Domain

28 “Measurably Happy”: The Children of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings

29 Retirement for One, Not for All

30 Endings and Beginnings

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

Notes

Selected Bibliography
**Chronology of the Hemings Family**

1735  Elizabeth Hemings (EH) is born.

1746  The marriage of John Wayles (JW) and Martha Eppes brings EH to the Forest.

1748  Martha Wayles is born. Martha Eppes dies and leaves EH as JW's property.

1753-  EH gives birth to Mary and Martin Hemings, Betty Brown, and Nancy

61    Hemings.

1762-  EH gives birth to five children by JW: Robert, James (JH), Thenia, Critta, and Peter.

1772  Martha Wayles Skelton (MWJ) marries Thomas Jefferson (TJ), and Betty Brown comes to Monticello as MWJ's maid.

1773  John Wayles dies at the Forest. The Hemingses come under the ownership of TJ and (MWJ). Sarah (Sally) Hemings (SH), the last child of EH and JW, is born.

1774  The Hemings family moves to Monticello.

1776-  TJ in Philadelphia drafts the Declaration of Independence; fourteen-year-old Robert Hemings (RH) lives with him as a manservant. John Hemings, last son of EH, is born at Monticello; in 1777 her last child, Lucy, is born.

1780  Joseph Fossett, son of Mary Hemings, is born.

1781  Wormley Hughes, son of Betty Brown, is born.

1782  Martin Hemings is left in charge of Monticello when TJ escapes from Tarleton's troops.

1782  MWJ dies at Monticello.

1783  SH goes to Eppington with TJ's daughters. Burwell Colbert, son of Betty Brown, is born.

1784  RH trains as a barber. JH goes to France with TJ.

1787  SH travels to London and lives with Abigail Adams, then joins her brother JH in Paris. Mary Hemings is leased to Thomas Bell.

1789  When SH balks at returning to America, TJ promises her a good life and the freedom of their children when they become adults. JH and SH return to Monticello in December.

1790  JH and RH go to New York with TJ. SH gives birth to her first child, who dies.

1791  JH goes to Philadelphia to serve as chef de cuisine in TJ's home.

1792  Mary Hemings asks to be sold to Thomas Bell. Martin Hemings asks to be sold to anyone.

1793  TJ puts his agreement to free JH in writing.
1794  TJ draws up a deed emancipating RH.
1795  TJ files the RH deed, and RH becomes legally free. Harriet Hemings I, daughter of SH and TJ, is born at Monticello.
1796  TJ draws up a deed emancipating JH. JH goes to Philadelphia, TJ files the deed, and JH becomes legally free.
1797  Harriet Hemings I dies.
1798  William Beverley Hemings, son of SH and TJ, is born.
1799  The first published allusions to TJ and SH appear in the press.
1800-01  Mary Hemings and her children Robert Washington Bell and Sarah Jefferson Bell inherit Thomas Bell's property upon his death. Harriet Hemings II is born at Monticello. JH turns down TJ's request that he become chef in the President's House. JH commits suicide in Baltimore.
1802  James Callender exposes the relationship between SH and TJ.
1805  James Madison Hemings, second son of SH and TJ, is born. Beverley Hemings is identified as the eldest son of TJ and SH.
1807  EH dies at Monticello. Joseph Fossett takes charge of the blacksmith shop at Monticello.
1808  Thomas Eston Hemings, the last child SH and TJ, is born at Monticello.
1810-26  Beverley and Madison and, then, Madison and Eston Hemings serve as apprentices to their uncle John Hemings, at Monticello and Poplar Forest. Harriet Hemings learns to weave.
1822  Beverley and Harriet leave Monticello to live as white people.
1826  TJ drafts a will formally freeing Burwell Colbert, Joseph Fossett, John Hemings, and Madison and Eston Hemings. TJ dies. SH, Madison, and Eston Hemings move to Charlottesville.
1827  The auction at Monticello disposes of TJ's personal property; the Hemings family is dispersed.
1831  Monticello is sold.
So the beginning of this was a woman...

—ZORA NEALE HURSTON,  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God*
A NUMBER OF YEARS back, while at the Massachusetts Historical Society for a speaking engagement, I had the chance to read through the original version of Thomas Jefferson’s Farm Book, an extremely valuable part of the society’s collection, a pivotal document within the vast array of the written material that Jefferson produced over the course of his very long lifetime. In it he recorded the names, births, family configurations, rations, and work assignments of all the people enslaved on his plantations. Waiting for books in research libraries was nothing new to me, but this time the anticipation was almost exponentially heightened because I was finally going to get to see and touch an item that I had been reading in facsimile form since high school. The librarian brought the Farm Book out to me, and I was slightly startled by its size. It was much smaller than I had imagined it would be and much more well-preserved, and I knew the society was taking great pains to keep it that way. The librarian left me alone. When I opened the pages to see that very familiar hand and the neatly written entries, many of which I knew by heart, I was completely overwhelmed. For a time I simply could not continue.

There had been other moments before then when I was brought up short while reading through the Farm Book and thinking of the people described in it and of the man who wrote it: Just who do you think you are!? He determined who got fish, and how many; who got cloth, and how much; and the number of blankets that were given out—the course of the lives of grown men, women, and their children set by this one man. I knew everything that was in the book, and understood what it meant long before I sat down to look at it again that day. Still, it was wrenching to hold the original and to know that Jefferson’s actual hand had dipped into the inkwell and touched these pages to create what was to me a record of human oppression. It took my breath away.

Of course, Jefferson did not see the Farm Book as I did. Had he thought it merely a record of oppression (greatly as he craved posterity’s favorable judgment), he would never have kept it. Certainly members of his legal white family would not have preserved it. They, too, were anxious to safeguard and cultivate his legacy because they loved him deeply and because their own sense of self was so firmly tied to that legacy. It is, in fact, highly unlikely that it ever occurred to Jefferson that his record of the lives of his slaves would become the subject of scholarly interest, even a passion among some—that his slaves’ lives would be chronicled and followed in minute detail, the interest in them often unmoored from any interest in him. No, this was a workaday document to tell him what he had to buy from year to year, to keep some sense of what would be needed to continue operations. In Jefferson’s monumentally patriarchal and self-absorbed view, one shared by his fellow slave-owning planters, this was Oh, the responsibilities I have! Here is what I have done and have yet to do for all “my
family.”

The word “family” brings us to the subject of this book: the Hemingses of Monticello. No one can know what they, who were his family both biologically and in the figurative sense in which Jefferson meant it, thought about the Farm Book. They are listed there too—his wife’s sisters and brothers, their children, their mother, and his own children. Members of the family almost certainly knew it existed, and if they knew, their other relatives knew as well. Martin, Robert, James, and Sally Hemings— their nephew Burwell Colbert—among others, were close enough to Jefferson to see his books, to come upon him working, to know the important and not so important things, emotional and physical, that were in his life.

However familiar they were with its contents, one thing that all of the enslaved people at Monticello would have known about the Farm Book, not just the Hemingses, is that it described some parts of their lives, but definitely not all, reproducing only a tiny fraction of a snapshot of life at Monticello that provides a very useful baseline for inquiry. What is in the book must be added to information from other sources, including the statements and actions of the Hemings family, Jefferson’s family letters, even some writings from Hemingses that reveal the family’s complicated relationship to the master of Monticello, and the wealth of information about the institution of slavery as it was lived during the Hemingses’ time.

That the names of the children of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson appear in a book detailing the lives of slaves conveniently and poignant encapsulates the tortured history of slavery and race in America. But Monticello was a world unto itself for four generations of Hemingses whose lives cannot be reduced to the saga of one nuclear family within its bloodline, important as that subset was. We must, and will, pay attention to them, but they were only part of a much larger family story. Opening the world of the other members of this family—to see how those particular African Americans made their way through slavery in America—is the purpose of this book. Theirs was a world that is (mercifully) gone, but must never be forgotten.
THE HEMINGSES of MONTICELLO
**Introduction**

In September of 1998, the Omohundro Institute of Early American Culture and History and the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia, hosted a conference designed to give scholars of slavery a preview of a newly compiled database of transatlantic slave voyages. For the first time in history, records of every known voyage of slave-trading vessels operating between Africa and the Americas would be available in a CD-ROM format. The implications for scholarly research were staggering. Information about an activity central to the development of the modern Western world would be available at the touch of a finger.

Though the conference unveiling this new research tool was designed primarily for scholars, with a heavy tilt toward those interested in economic history, scores of laypeople—mainly blacks—came too, hoping to find some word, some trace, of their ancestors. Not all were looking for “ancestors” in the general sense in which many blacks refer to those enslaved in America from the seventeenth century through most of the nineteenth. It was clear that many hoped the database might help them find their specific progenitors—what their names were and where they came from. Others not interested in their own genealogy apparently had come hoping to hear more of the lives of individuals who endured the Middle Passage.

Their hopes were largely dashed. There were no passenger manifests for slave voyages. Slavers were not interested in the names of the Africans bound for bondage in the New World. Notations about the voyages served strictly business purposes and included the names of the vessel, the captain, and, perhaps, a first mate, the number of the human cargo, where they came from, and where they were going, along with any onboard events that might inform future voyages. Was there a revolt, a problem with rations? It was left to the enslaved Africans to keep the memory of their identities and origins alive—no small task, particularly in the land that would become the United States, as generations passed and Africans became Americans.

While the conference was just about what I had expected, it frustrated many of those who had come to Williamsburg hoping to make a personal connection to the African captives. Each day when we broke for lunch or refreshments, I could hear murmurs of concern about the way things were proceeding. By the end of the conference, one participant, angered by what he perceived as the coldness of historians talking about slavery in terms of “the numbers of people sent here” and “the numbers of people sent there,” erupted. The conference, he charged, was devoid of feeling and emotion. Where was the scope of the human loss? Where was the sense of the bottomless tragedy of it all?

Of course, the evidence of human loss and tragedy was right there. The numbers told a story, but in the detached and steely way that numbers tend to do. Slavery had many aspects, and getting a handle on the logistics and economics of the institution
(how many people were moved, how many ships were used, how many miles over the ocean were covered, how much money was made) is as vital as telling personal stories—as vital but, perhaps, not as immediately compelling. It is a safe bet that most people respond more forcefully and intensely to other people than to numbers. So the lament about the conference’s alleged focus on numbers compiled to suit the aims of businessmen, if not a little unfair, was understandable. Statistical data about a cargo of human beings, deplorable and heartrending as that is, is depersonalized. One yearns to know the individuals behind the statistics. What were their names? There is great power in a name. What were their lives like before the horror that engulfed them? How did they cope in the New World? What were their stories?

While it is true that the lives of the vast majority of people who lived during the time of American slavery are lost to history, the anonymity of American slaves is even more pronounced. The business of shipping slaves required no gathering and recording of information about the captives as individuals, and the business of keeping slaves was similarly minimalist. And few slaves had the chance to supplement the record by setting down their “stories” in either diaries, letters to family, or official records—marriage banns, birth announcements, wills proved—the kinds of documents that allow many white Americans to reconstruct at least some part of their family stories, or the story as they would like to tell it. The medium of biography, so effective in conveying information about times gone by, and perhaps the most accessible and popular form of historical writing, is problematic in the context of slavery.

Remaining for those who seek to “know” American slaves (and the institution of slavery) are the memories of those enslaved, the records of white owners who in taking care of business kept track of their human property, and information about the larger historical context in which all these individuals operated. Getting at this last source, the historical context, is by necessity a huge interdisciplinary enterprise—a matter of law, anthropology, psychology, archaeology, and economics—all the universe of influences that shaped lives under slavery. In gathering information, we must cast the net as widely as possible if we want to see slavery through the eyes of the enslaved.

The Hemings family of Monticello escaped the enforced anonymity of slavery for a number of reasons: first, because multiple generations of this large clan were owned by one of history’s most well-known figures, Thomas Jefferson, an inveterate record keeper and writer of letters. Jefferson’s papers have been grist for the scholarly mill for many years, and members of the Hemings family have long figured in Jefferson scholarship, but only as side characters in the saga of Jefferson and his white family. Only recently have the Hemingses and other members of Monticello’s enslaved community become the focus of scholarly attention. It is a sad paradox, in a story overrun with paradox and irony, that their being the “property” of a famous man ensured that, as the Jefferson scholar James A. Bear has pointed out, more would be known about this family of slaves than is known about the vast majority of freeborn white Virginians of the time.

And then there is the place itself. Monticello, one of the best-known residences in the United States during Jefferson’s time and today, is rich with the history of the Hemings family. Hemingses helped build and maintain the house, crafted furniture for it, and laid its floors. They worked as servants within the household, tended the
gardens, and performed other essential tasks throughout the plantation. They lived there as husbands and wives, raising their children in slavery as best they could. Some died and were buried there. It is, quite simply, impossible to tell an adequate history of the mountain without including Hemingses.

Of course, the main reason that people all over the world have known about this particular enslaved family, during and after the era of slavery, is Jefferson’s relationship with Sarah Hemings, known most famously by her nickname Sally. Hemings and Jefferson were talked about in their immediate community during the 1790s, and their story, or a version of it, burst upon the national scene in the early 1800s when Jefferson’s enemies sought to use their relationship as a weapon to destroy his presidency and to prevent his election to a second term. The tactic did not work. Jefferson won in a landslide, bringing to office with him a large Republican majority in Congress. “The people,” whose wisdom Jefferson trusted (sometimes almost too implicitly), either did not believe the Hemings story or thought it trivial when compared with what they felt Jefferson and his administration had to offer them.

These events were not just about the life and fortunes of Thomas Jefferson. Other people were involved. Sally Hemings, her children, her mother, and other members of her family were dragged into the national spotlight in a way unprecedented for individual American slaves. During the early part of the nineteenth century, Sally Hemings appeared in newspapers as “Dusky Sally,” “Yellow Sally,” and even “Mrs. Sarah Jefferson.” She was depicted in cartoons and lampooned in bawdy ballads—all alongside Thomas Jefferson. The story crossed the Atlantic, with foreign commentators weighing in with their own perspectives.

Sally Hemings is often treated as a figure of no historical significance—a mere object of malicious personal gossip. That shouldn’t surprise. Aside from forays into “history from the bottom up”—a perspective that has been given increased emphasis over the past forty years—historical writing tends to favor the lives of individuals who spoke, acted, and had a direct hand in shaping whatever particular “moment” they lived in. Hemings does not fit the bill on any of these accounts. She neither spoke publicly about her life nor engaged in any public acts that have been recorded. Others—journalists, Jefferson’s enemies—determined how she entered the spotlight; and they put her there with no real interest in her as a person.

Even though she was not in control of her life, Hemings must be seen as a figure of historical importance for a multiplicity of reasons, not the least of which is that her name and her life entered the public record during the run-up to a presidential election. Much has been written about Jefferson’s daughters and grandchildren, and they are treated as historically important simply because of their legal relationship to him, even though none of them ever figured in the politics and public life of his day. On the other hand, politically ambitious men with power used Hemings and her children as weapons against Jefferson while he was alive and in the decades immediately following his death. Her connection to him inspired the first novel published by an African American. It had resonance within black communities as ministers and black journalists in the early American Republic preached on and referred to Hemings’s family situation, one that would have seemed quite familiar to their predominately mixed-race audiences, most of whom were free precisely because their fathers or immediate forefathers had been white men. Finally, Hemings’s story affected members
of Jefferson’s white family, notably his grandchildren who, for the benefit of the historians who they knew would one day come calling, fashioned an image of life at Monticello designed in part to obscure her relevance. Even without direct agency in these matters, Sally Hemings has had an impact on the shaping of history.

More important for our purposes, we must also see the public spectacle surrounding Hemings and Jefferson as a defining episode in the lives of all the Hemingses. No contemporaneous evidence of what members of the family were thinking as the talk of the pair made its way through the country’s newspapers and communities has come to light. They surely knew that people were talking because others at Monticello—members of Jefferson’s white family, his friends, and at least one white Jefferson employee—are on record stating that the relationship was much talked about in Jefferson’s neighborhood. In every community, throughout history, slaves and servants have been privy to the innermost secrets, anxieties, strengths, weaknesses, successes, and failures of the people they served. The Hemingses were no different.

There is much evidence that the Hemings-Jefferson connection meant a great deal to some members of her family. Madison Hemings, who at age sixty-eight spoke of his life as the second son of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, told part of his family’s story to an interviewer in 1873, setting down valuable information about the family’s origins, life at Monticello, and the lives of one branch of the family after emancipation. The historians Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright have noted the other ways in which the Hemings-Jefferson liaison helped keep the Hemingses’ story at Monticello alive for successive generations of the family. Apparently, the relationship and its notoriety were critical reference points, not only for the descendants of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson but for collateral branches of the family as well, serving as a guidepost that helped them remember who they were and where their family had been. Even the descendants of slaves at Monticello who were not members of the Hemings family carried the story of Hemings and Jefferson as an important truth about life on the mountain. When other things were forgotten, that understanding remained.

Sally Hemings and her children have overshadowed the lives of other members of her family. How could they not, given their relationship to Thomas Jefferson, who himself looms like a colossus over the lives of all those who will be discussed in these pages. In recognition of the importance of the topic, chapters 14 through 17 veer slightly from the narrative to provide an in-depth analysis of the pair’s beginnings in Paris. There is, however, far more to the Hemingses than “Sally and Tom,” and although that pair must be a critical part of our consideration, this book is not designed to tell just their story. There are many others who complete the picture of the family’s time in slavery and whose lives deserve to be woven into the tapestry of American history.

No look at Monticello and slavery would be complete without a portrait of Sally Hemings’s brother James Hemings, who lived in France with Jefferson for five years along with his sister Sally. These two members of the Hemings family traveled the farthest distance from slavery at Monticello, experiencing life in what was, at the time, perhaps the most cultivated city on earth and even witnessing the start of the French Revolution. Their time in France forever altered the course of their lives. For Sally
Hemings it marked the beginning of her time with Jefferson. For James Hemings it marked the beginning of the end. In his life we see the tragedy of talent thwarted by the limitations of slavery and white supremacy.

Then there is the story of John Hemings, the extremely talented carpenter and joiner whose work is still on display at Monticello. In John Hemings’s life we see the blend of slavery as a work system and as a system of personal relationships. Hemings, who helped Jefferson realize his vision for the look of Monticello, was also a surrogate father to Jefferson’s sons Beverley, Madison, and Eston.

It was not just the males in the family who were prime movers, as much as enslaved people could be. Mary Hemings, the eldest of the first generation of Hemings siblings, exerted a remarkable influence upon the family. She was the first to maneuver her way out of slavery on the mountain. She was able to be a source of refuge, stability, and monetary support for her relatives who remained in bondage at Monticello—up to and beyond the time of the family’s dispersal in 1827, when Jefferson’s human property was sold after his death to pay his enormous debts.

Every story has a beginning, and we will start there. One could argue strenuously that the central (and most compelling) figure in the family’s history was not Sally Hemings but her mother, Elizabeth, whose experiences in life helped project her influence down the family line. Elizabeth Hemings, known as Betty, was the matriarch of a family that over four generations numbered in the dozens. She was well suited to that role for many reasons, not the least of which is that she lived a very long time—seventy-two years, well beyond the average life span of Virginians of her day, black or white. Also, she had many children—by one count, fourteen of them, although only twelve have been positively identified as hers. Half of her children had a black father, half had a white father. Her grandchildren, some of whom were born while she was still bearing children, had black fathers and white fathers. The mixing continued into succeeding generations until some of her descendants decided to move totally away from their African origins, while others resolutely clung to it.

Behind all of this stands Elizabeth Hemings, the person of origin for the family and their story. The unnamed African woman who was her mother, John Wayles (who fathered six of her children, including Sally Hemings), Martha Wayles Jefferson (Wayles’s eldest daughter, Jefferson’s wife, and Sally’s half sister), Thomas Jefferson, and Sally Hemings—all of them lived for a time under her knowing gaze. If one person could be brought forward to help tell this story of slavery, intertwined families, pain, loss, silence, denial, and endurance, hers would be the most valuable voice.

Like all enslaved parents, Elizabeth Hemings lived with the possibility that her family would be broken up by sale or gift. In fact, two of her adult children were sold—one to be united with her enslaved husband, who lived on a nearby plantation, the other to cohabit with a white merchant in Charlottesville. Jefferson freed two of her sons during her lifetime, and they left Monticello to live on their own. Another daughter was given as a wedding present to one of Jefferson’s sisters. For the most part, however, the Hemings family remained intact, or within close proximity to one another, for their entire lives. As a result each member had, in the person of Elizabeth Hemings, a mother/grandmother to be the repository of family lore and center of family attention.

The women of the family were house servants who worked alongside one another
for years. Their brothers, sons, and nephews were butlers or valets to Jefferson. The Hemings men who were not in the house were artisans who worked just outside of it on Mulberry Row, which abuts and runs parallel to the main house at Monticello. One of Hemings’s many grandchildren set the scene recalling a childhood spent running errands in and out of the big house surrounded entirely by (and this to him was extraordinary and important) members of his family. In this compact area, the Hemingses would have seen and interacted with one another every single day.

In sum, this family was at least as much “together” as many other families who lived on farms during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Moreover, in the Hemingses’ confined world on the mountain, the entire enslaved community in which they lived was basically stable over the years. With few exceptions—births, deaths, temporary moves from one household to another—the rolls of Jefferson’s Monticello slaves do not change much over the decades. That the Hemingses were enslaved thus did not automatically render them incapable of knowing who they were, of knowing their mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers. Slavery did not destroy their ability to observe, remember, and reason. It did not prevent them from forming enduring and meaningful attachments. It did not make them untrustworthy—certainly not when compared with the people who held them in bondage. In short, nothing about their enslaved status makes them undeserving of our considered and unprejudiced attention.

We do not have, in the Hemingses, an enslaved family with loose ties, little knowledge of family history, and no family cohesion. That Virginia law did not protect their family does not end the inquiry, for legal regimes are not omnipotent. Powerful as they may be, they never have (and never will, because they cannot) control all human feelings and arrangements. While it is certainly important to be aware of what could have happened to this enslaved family because its members were not ultimately in control of their destiny, that knowledge should not overshadow what can be gleaned by considering what actually happened to them. Under the circumstances of their lives, the Hemingses were able to achieve and maintain a coherent family identity that existed within slavery and survived it.

Central to the Hemingses’ identity was their being of mixed race. Basing American slavery on race created a world where, put simply, it was better to be white than black. Being “in between” was meaningful as well, and the Hemingses’ interracial origins helped determine the course of the family’s history. The conventional wisdom that white slave owners sometimes valued more highly those slaves who most resembled white people was very much a part of life at Monticello, and the Hemingses benefited from it. Although, as we will see, at least one other enslaved family, the Grangers, who appear to have been of completely African origin, rivaled, if not exceeded, the Hemingses in the amount of trust Jefferson reposed in them.

Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Jefferson’s eldest grandson, extolled the virtues of the Hemingses specifically. He said that while slaves on the plantation had their own theories for why the Hemingses were favored, the true reasons were their “superior intelligence, capacity and fidelity to trust.” There is no cause to doubt that the Hemingses were indeed intelligent, but we should also consider what role their appearance and the knowledge of their genetic makeup may have played in his assessment of them. Randolph was likely influenced by the common view among