

Jefferson and Slavery

An Online Professional Development Seminar
For North Carolina Teachers

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Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

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from the National Humanities Center

FROM THE FORUM

Challenges, Issues, Questions

- How could the author of the Declaration of Independence condone the owning of slaves?
- How did Jefferson personally come to terms with his owning of slaves, given his belief that “all men are created equal”?
- Did Jefferson’s views on slavery change over time? If so, what influenced him to change his mind?
- How did Jefferson treat his slaves?
- What was his relationship with Sally Hemmings?

GOALS

- To deepen understanding of Thomas Jefferson's views on slavery
- To provide fresh primary resources for use with students
- To promote the use of close textual analysis in classroom instruction



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2009-10

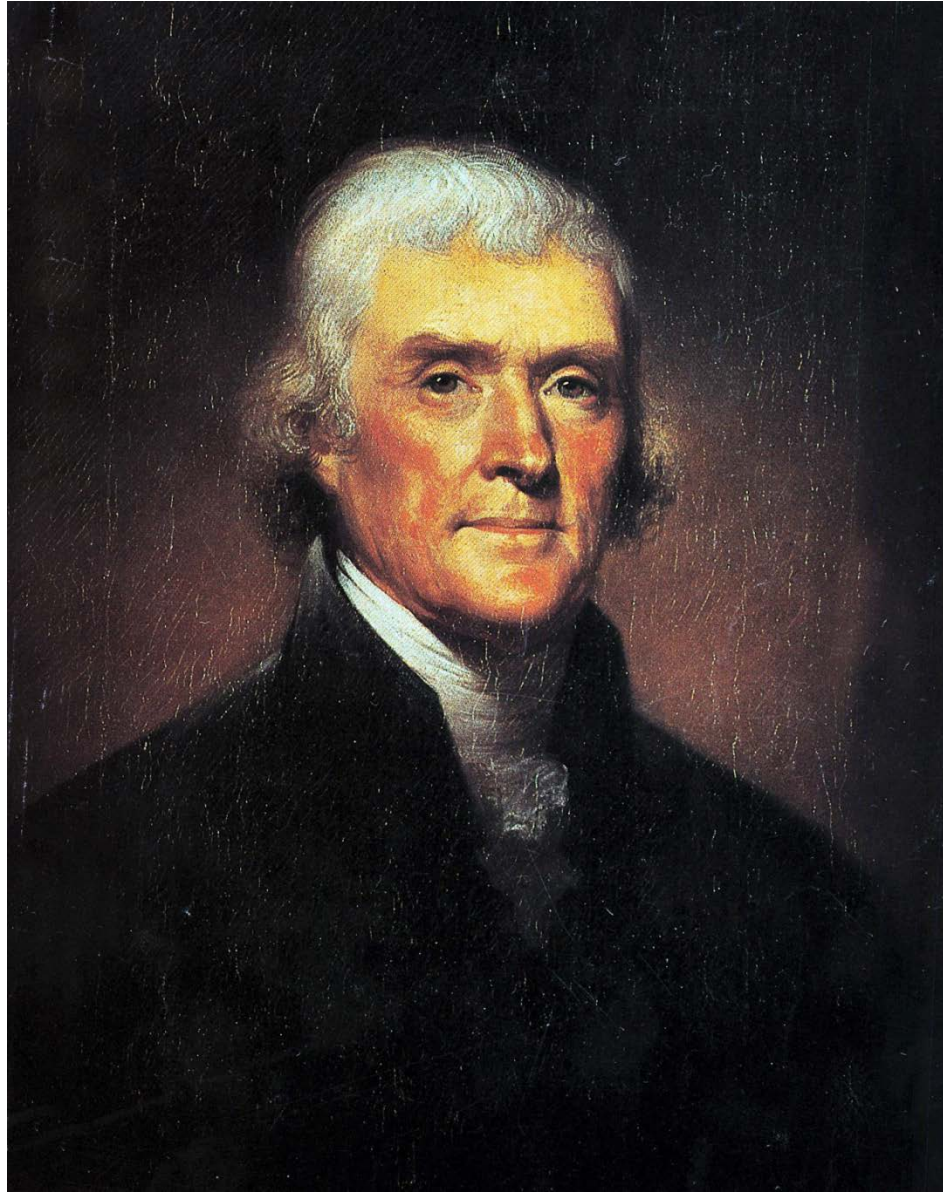
RESEARCH INTERESTS

African-American Intellectual and Cultural History;
American Intellectual and Cultural History; African
Diaspora

To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells. (2009)

*The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American
Ideas About White People 1830-1925.* (2000)

Jefferson and Slavery



We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

The Declaration of Independence, 1776

Jefferson and Slavery



Mr. Jefferson was always very kind and indulgent to his servants. He would not allow them to be at all overworked, and he would hardly ever allow one of them to be whipped. His orders to me were constant, that if there was any servant that could not be got along with without the chastising that was customary, to dispose of him. He could not bear to have a servant whipped, no odds how much he deserved it

Captain Edmund Bacon

Jefferson and Slavery

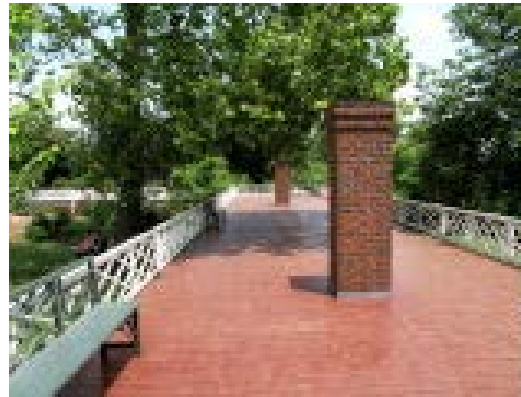


View of the West Front of Monticello and Garden,
by Jane Braddick Peticolas,
watercolor on paper, 1825

The figures are Mary, Cornelia,
and George Wythe Randolph
(some of Jefferson's
grandchildren).

Jefferson and Slavery

Views of Monticello



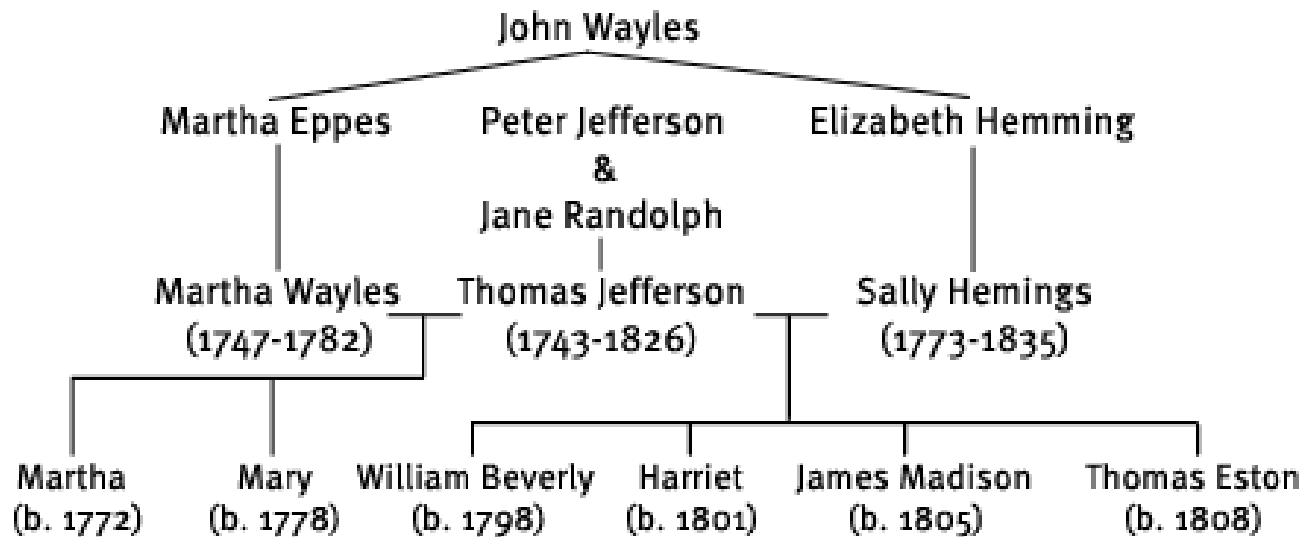


Portrait of Jefferson's daughter

Martha "Patsy" Jefferson Randolph, who shared a grandfather with Sally Hemings. His father-in-law John Wayles fathered both Jefferson's wife, Martha Skelton Wayles Jefferson, and Bette Hemings (Sally's mother).

No portrait of either these two half sisters exists.

Jefferson and Slavery



I know that it was a general statement among the older servants at Monticello, that Mr. Jefferson promised his wife, on her death bed, that he would not again marry. I also know that his servant, Sally Hemmings, (mother to my old friend and former companion at Monticello, Madison Hemmings,) was employed as his chamber-maid, and that Mr. Jefferson was on the most intimate terms with her; that, in fact, she was his concubine. This I know from my intimacy with both parties, and when Madison Hemmings declares that he is a natural son of Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, and that his brothers Beverly and Eston and sister Harriet are of the same parentage, I can as conscientiously confirm his statement as any other fact which I believe from circumstances but do not positively know.

Israel Jefferson

Jefferson and Slavery



Lucy, ca. 1845.
Daguerreotype.

Courtesy of Mason County Museum.

...my father, Thomas Jefferson, I knew more of his domestic than his public life during his life time. It is only since his death that I have learned much of the latter, except that he was considered as a foremost man in the land, and held many important trusts, including that of President. I learned to read by inducing the white children to teach me the letters and something more; what else I know of books I have picked up here and there till now I can read and write.... His general temperament was smooth and even; he was very undemonstrative. He was uniformly kind to all about him. He was not in the habit of showing partiality or fatherly affection to us children. We were the only children of his by a slave woman. He was affectionate toward his white grandchildren, of whom he had fourteen, twelve of whom lived to manhood and womanhood. His daughter Martha married Thomas Mann Randolph by whom she had thirteen children. Two died in infancy. The names of the living were Ann, Thomas Jefferson, Ellen, Cornelia, Virginia, Mary, James, Benj. Franklin, Lewis Madison, Septemia and Geo. Wythe.

Madison Hemings

The situation of the female slave is more deplorable & degrading than that of the untutored savage. For littel as savages respect the rights of women & children, their women have exemption from labour, & protection from insult during those delicate & painful periods which are peculiar to their sex; & their children are instructed in all the knowledge which is by them deem either useful or ornamental. The degree of servitude to which savage women are bound, is trifling in comparison with the task of a female slave; and inasmuch as their husbands & children reap the fruits of their labour, & in some measure repay it by acquiring a superior skill in hunting & war their labour becomes rather a pleasure than a burden. But what is to mitigate the labour of the poor female slave, with the precious burden of her affections at her breast? Slavery is unjust, as it destroys all the physical & commercial distinctions of labour & property. It is a mere monopoly of labour men, and all their abilities and services.

A Slave Writes Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson and Slavery



Isaac Jefferson

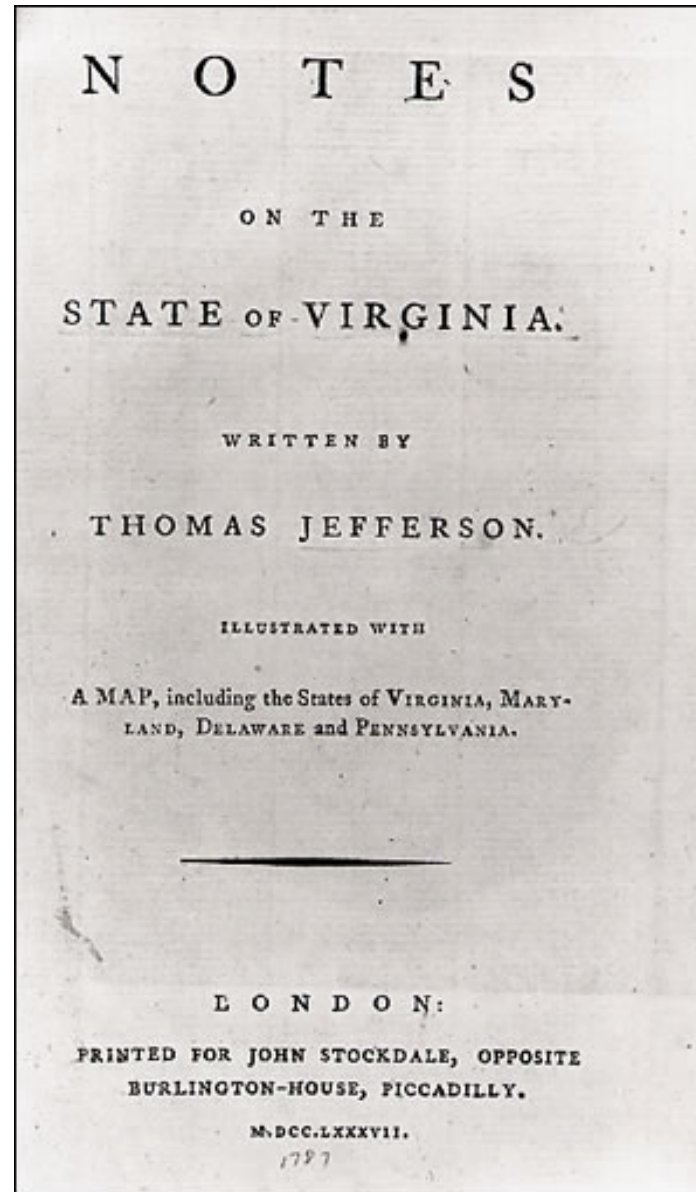
“Mr. Jefferson bowed to everybody he meet: talked wid his arms folded. Gave the boys in the nail-factory a pound of meat a week, a dozen herrings, a quart of molasses and peck of meal. Give them that wukked the best a suit of red or blue: encouraged them mightily. Isaac calls him a mighty good master”

Jefferson and Slavery

	woolen	shirting	blankets	beds	hats
Robert	5 1/2	7			157
Sally Hem.			1		
Harriet 1	5	6 2/3			
Madison 3					
Eston 8					
Sancho.	5 1/2	7			1
Scilla	5	7	1	1	1
Jamy 11.	2 1/2	3			
miles 16.	1 1/4	1 1/3			
Shepherd	5 1/2	7			1
Indridy	5	7		1	
Solomon	5 1/2	7			1
Thrimston	5 1/2	7			
Wormly	5 1/2	7	1		
Ursula	5	7		1	1
Joe 5	4.	5			
Anne 7	3 1/2	4 1/3			
Dolly 9	3	3 2/3			
Cornelius 11	2 1/2	3			
Thomas 13	2	2 1/3			
Louisa 16	1 1/4	1 1/3			
140.	52 3 1/2	69 0 2/3	32	10.	

The names of Sally Hemings and her children listed in Thomas Jefferson's slave records, *Farm Book*, 1774-1824, Page 157. Original manuscript from the Coolidge Collection of Thomas Jefferson Manuscripts at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society

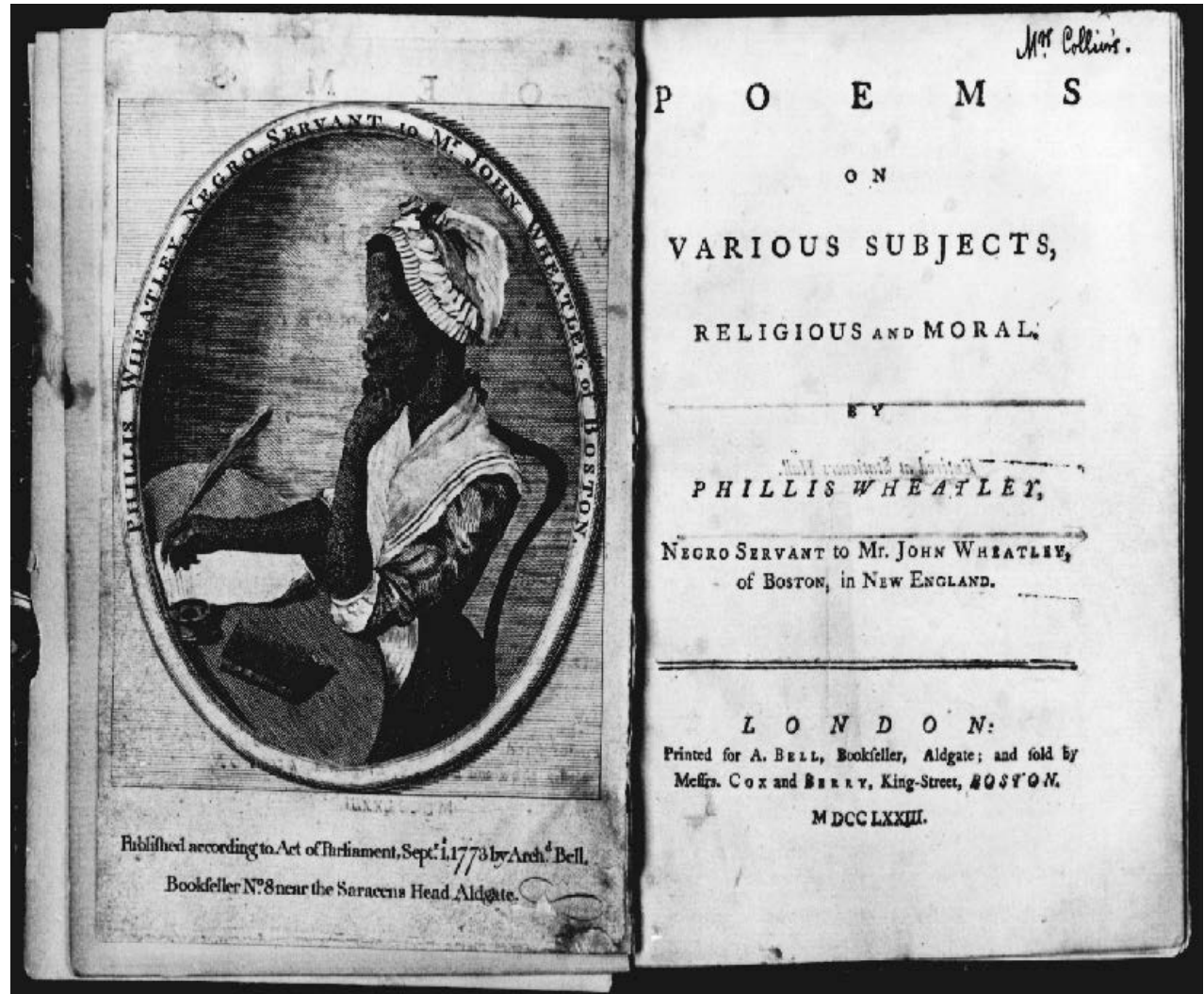


Jefferson and Slavery

“Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately [sic]; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism. The heroes of the *Dunciad** are to her, as Hercules to the author of that poem.”

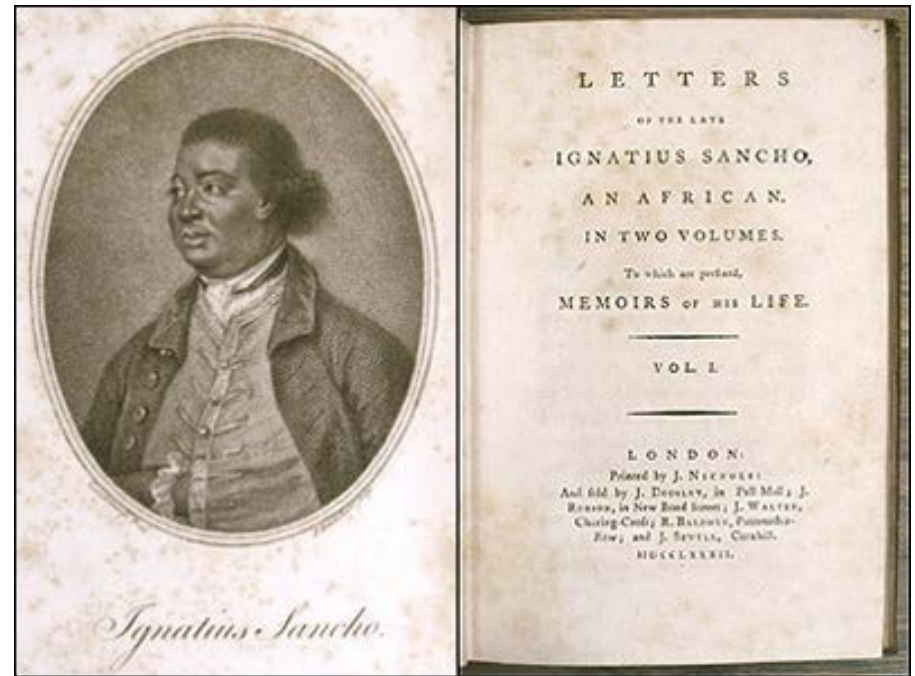
Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*

*1728 literary satire by English poet Alexander Pope



Jefferson and Slavery

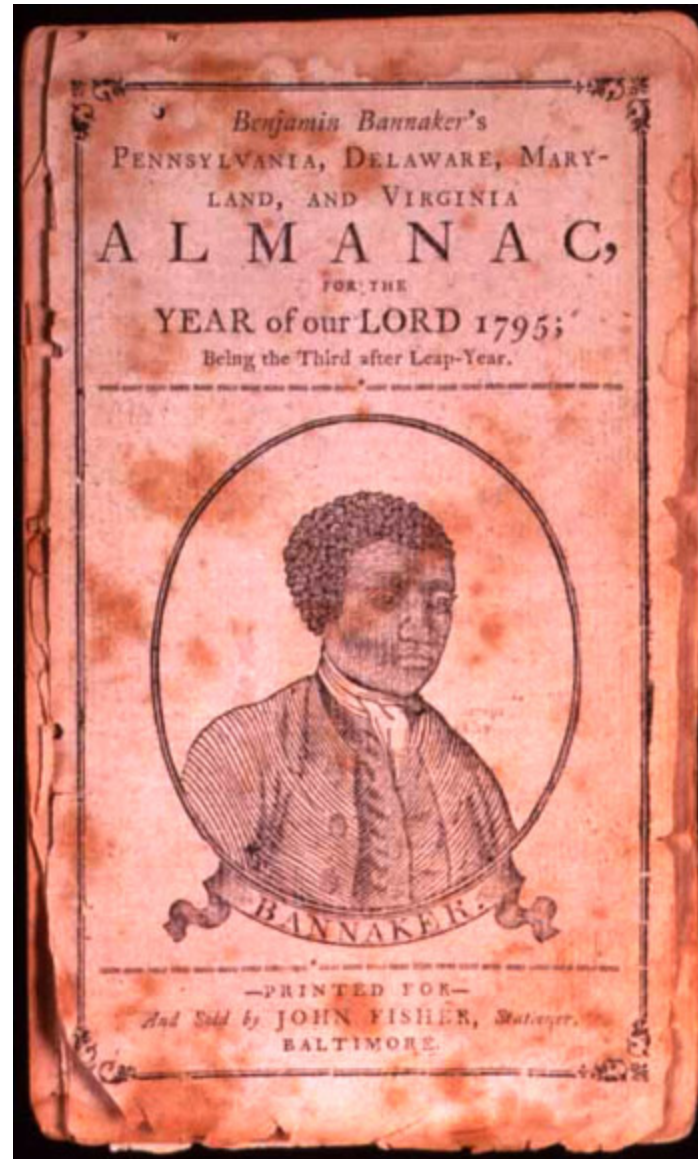
Ignatius Sancho has approached nearer to merit in composition; yet his letters do more honour to the heart than the head. They breathe the purest effusions of friendship and general philanthropy, and shew how great a degree of the latter may be compounded with strong religious zeal. He is often happy in the turn of his compliments, and his stile is easy and familiar, except when he affects a Shandean* fabrication of words. But his imagination is wild and extravagant, escapes incessantly from every restraint of reason and taste, and in course of its vagaries, leaves a tract of thought as incoherent and eccentric, as is the course of a meteor through the sky.



His subjects should often have led him to a process of sober reasoning: yet we find him always substituting sentiment for demonstration. Upon the whole, though we admit him to the first place among those of his own colour who have presented themselves to the public judgment, yet when we compare him with the writers of the race among whom he lived, and particularly with the epistolary class, in which he has taken his own stand, we are compelled to enroll him at the bottom of the column. This criticism supposes the letters published under his name to be genuine, and to have received amendment from no other hand; points which would not be of easy investigation.

*Whimsical word play in the fashion of the 1759 novel *Tristram Shandy* by the English writer Laurence Sterne

Jefferson and Slavery



...I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications. Will not a lover of natural history then, one who views the gradations in all the races of animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them? This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people. Many of their advocates, while they wish to vindicate the liberty of human nature, are anxious also to preserve its dignity and beauty. Some of these, embarrassed by the question 'What further is to be done with them?' join themselves in opposition with those who are actuated by sordid avarice only. Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.

Jefferson and Slavery



*from "A Song Supposed to Have Been Written by
the Sage of Monticello"*

Et etiam *fusco grata* colore Venus. OVID.

And Venus pleases though as black as jet.

Of all the damsels on the green,
On mountain, or in valley,
A lass so luscious ne'er was seen
As Monticellian Sally.

Yankee doodle, who's the noodle?
What wife were half so handy?
To breed a flock, of slaves for stock,
A blackamoor's the dandy. . . .

When press'd by loads of state affairs,
I seek to sport and dally,
The sweetest solace of my cares
Is in the lap of Sally.
Yankee doodle, &c. . . .

You call her slave—and pray were slaves
Made only for the galley?
Try for yourselves, ye witless knaves—
Take each to bed your Sally.

Yankee doodle, whose the noodle?
Wine's vapid, tope me brandy—
For still I find to breed my kind,
A negro-wench the dandy!

(October 2, 1802)³²¹

Jefferson and Slavery



Oct 3. 42—tf WM. NEALE & CO.
EXECUTOR'S SALE.
WILL be sold on the premises, on the first day of January, 1827, that well known and valuable estate called Poplar Forest, lying in the counties of Bedford and Campbell, the property of Thomas Jefferson, dec. within eight miles of Lynchburg and three of New London; also about 70 likely and valuable negroes, with stock, crops, &c. The terms of sale will be accommodating and made known previous to the day.
On the fifteenth of January, at Monticello, in the county of Albemarle; the whole of the residue of the personal property 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. The household furniture, many valuable historical and portrait paintings, busts of marble and plaster of distinguished individuals; one of marble of Thomas Jefferson, by Garacci, with the pedestal and truncated column on which it stands; a polygraph or copying instrument used by Thomas Jefferson, for the last twenty-five years; with various other articles curious and useful to men of business and private families. The terms of sale will be accommodating and made known previous to the day. The sales will be continued from day to day until completed. These sales being unavoidable, it is a sufficient guarantee to the public, that they will take place at the times and places appointed.
THOMAS J. RANDOLPH,
Executor of Th. Jefferson, dec.
Nov. 3. 51—tds
COPPER AND IRON FOR 1827.
Navv Commissioners' Office.

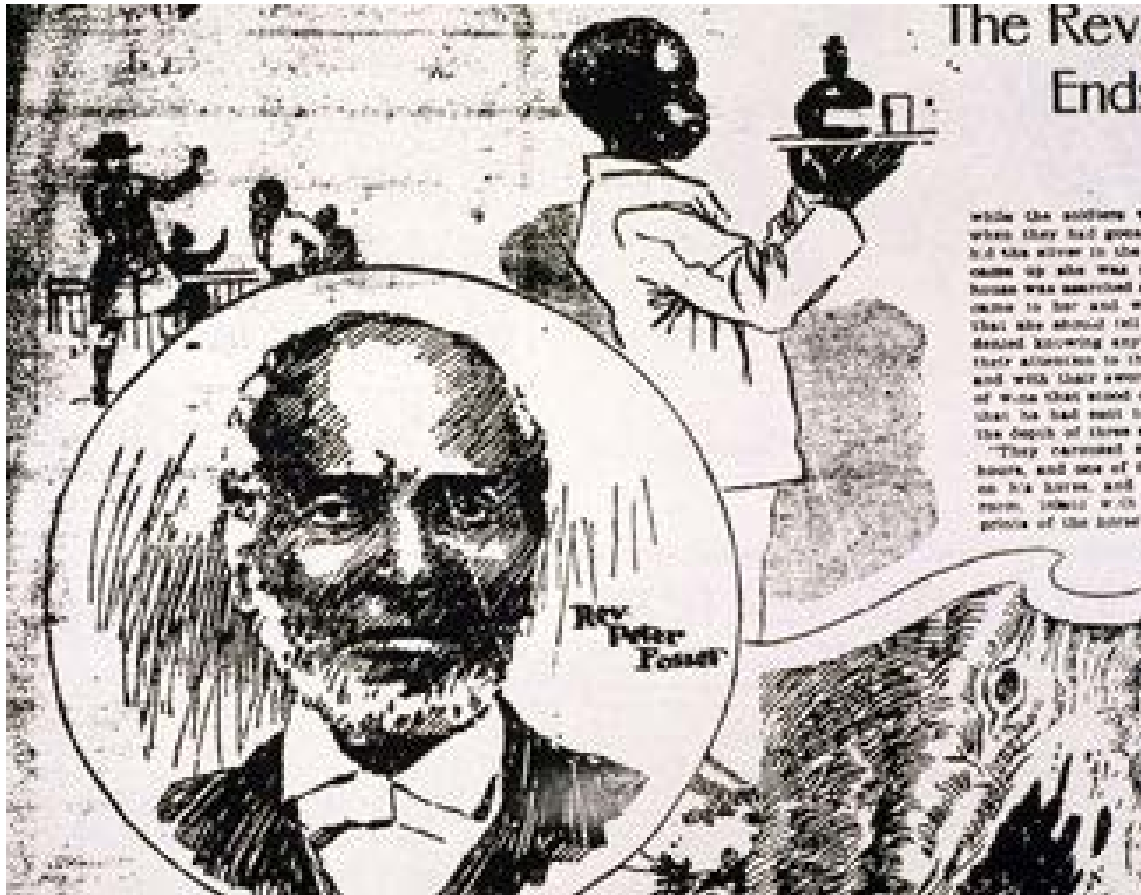
This advertisement in the Charlottesville *Central Gazette*, 13 Jan. 1827, offers for sale "130 VALUABLE NEGROES" from the estate of Thomas Jefferson.

<http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/archives/documents/ih195824z.htm>

His death was an affair of great moment and uncertainty to us slaves, for Mr. Jefferson provided for the freedom of 7 servants only: Sally, his chambermaid, who took the name of Hemings, her four children-- Beverly, Harriet, Madison and Eston--John Hemmings, brother to Sally, and Burrell Colburn [Burwell Colbert], an old and faithful body servant. Madison Hemings is now a resident of Ross county, Ohio, whose history you gave in the Republican of March 13, 1873. All the rest of us were sold from the auction block, by order of Jefferson Randolph, his grandson and administrator. The sale took place in 1829, three years after Mr. Jefferson's death.

Israel Jefferson

Jefferson and Slavery



Peter Fosset,
New York World,
January 30, 1898

(After Jefferson died in 1826) Sorrow came not only to the homes of two great men who had been such fast friends in life as Jefferson and Adams, but to the slaves of Thomas Jefferson. The story of my own life is like a fairy tale, and you would not believe me if I told to you the scenes enacted during my life of slavery. It passes through my mind like a dream. Born and reared as free, not knowing that I was a slave, then suddenly, at the death of Jefferson, put upon an auction block and sold to strangers.

Peter Fosset

Jefferson and Slavery



Elizabeth-Ann Fossett Isaacs was the daughter of Joseph Fosset, one of Sally Hemmings' nephews. Along with her mother, and seven siblings, she was sold at the January 1827 auction following Jefferson's death.

Final slide.

Thank you