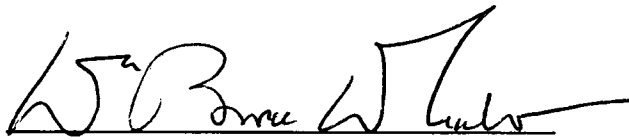


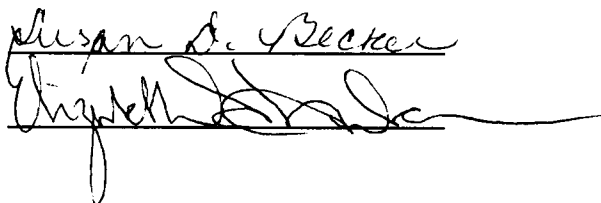
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Robert Glenn Parkinson entitled "A Founder Held 'Hostage': The Image of Thomas Jefferson in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts, with a major in History.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "W. Bruce Wheeler", written over a horizontal line.

William Bruce Wheeler, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:

Two handwritten signatures in dark ink. The first signature, "Susan D. Becker", is written above a horizontal line. The second signature, "Elizabeth S. Baker", is written below the first signature and also over a horizontal line.

Accepted for the Council:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Lew Minkel", written over a horizontal line.

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

A Founder Held "Hostage": The Image of Thomas Jefferson in the Civil Rights
Movement, 1954-1968

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert Glenn Parkinson
December 1998

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Dedication

For Sharon

Acknowledgments

It wasn't until Christmas 1994 that I truly realized I wanted to be a historian. After tramping about graveyards in southwestern Pennsylvania with my father researching a senior honors paper, I knew what the future held. From that cold weekend until today there have been several people who have stood by me under the duress of graduate school.

First, my mother and father have been enormously supportive and have listened even when I know they didn't want to. They will never know how much I appreciate their continued guidance and confidence.

Also, I appreciate the work of Professors Susan Becker and Elizabeth Haiken, who took an interest in both my project and myself. Their expectations have pushed me to be excellent, and for that I am very grateful.

For the past five years, Dr. Bruce Wheeler has played several roles in my life: advisor, mentor, scholar, and counselor. He is the driving force behind this thesis and behind my graduate studies. My career as a historian is in his debt.

Lastly, the greatest debt is owed to my wife, Sharon. She is truly a patient, understanding, and compassionate woman who is selflessly prepared to accompany me down the difficult path of graduate school. Without her, this project would never have been successful.

Abstract

This thesis examines the use of Thomas Jefferson's image throughout the South's struggle over civil rights. Looking at the fourteen years that followed the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision, I have investigated how Southern white supporters of segregation and black civil rights activists manipulated and invoked the image of Jefferson to support their specific agendas. It is my argument that the roots of the late 1960s change in how historians interpreted Jefferson are based in the popular debate over his image that raged because of the civil rights movement.

The segregationists' campaign to "capture" the heroic image of Jefferson – memorialized in a Washington D.C. temple in 1943 – was successful in linking Jefferson to a racist, unpopular movement. Black civil rights leaders, conversely, did not attempt to rescue the memorialized Jefferson. As the civil rights movement moved further left in the late 1960s, black leaders in fact also began to criticize the heroic image in ways that echoed their white extremist enemies. Out of this active debate came the first historical monographs that emphasized Jefferson's racism and the popular narrative of his relationship with Sally Hemings.

My evidence is based in historian's works, used here as primary sources, and in popular media, such as newspapers, national magazines, and speeches by famous black activists and segregationist leaders.

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A Founder Held "Hostage": The Image of Thomas Jefferson in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968

In The Jefferson Image in the American Mind (1960), Merrill D. Peterson proclaimed that, with the bicentennial of his birth and the construction of the national memorial, Thomas Jefferson had bid farewell to the arena of politics and ascended forever into the "American pantheon." Yet Peterson, the recipient of the Bancroft prize and the occupant of the Thomas Jefferson Chair of History at the University of Virginia, was wrong. Indeed, even as Peterson completed his monumental study, a lively contest over the ownership of that very symbol was being waged. Although Peterson correctly asserted that the traditional debate over the politics of Jefferson versus Hamilton had ended with the New Deal, he miscast Jefferson by relegating him strictly to his mountaintop home. For Peterson, Jefferson in the mid-twentieth century became simply a cultural symbol of early America. In actuality, the new challenge over human equality and civil rights in the 1950s and 60s called into contention many more dimensions of the image of Jefferson than simply his political ideals.¹

The Jefferson image, which Peterson defined as "the composite representation of the historic personage and of the ideas and ideals, policies and sentiments, habitually

¹ Merrill D. Peterson, The Jefferson Image in the American Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 379.

identified with him,” enjoyed its greatest triumph during and in the years that followed World War II. America’s clash with totalitarianism created a renewed interest in the nation’s most articulate exponent of human rights and democracy, Thomas Jefferson. The “heroic” image of Jefferson conflated the vision and principles of the famed author of the Declaration of Independence with the nation’s own creed – which was currently facing its toughest test on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific – and was symbolically enshrined in 1943 with the completion of the Tidal Basin memorial.²

In the center of the Jefferson Memorial stands a nineteen-foot-tall bronze statue of the Sage of Monticello. Surrounding the figure are four large marble panels on which are inscribed many of his famous quotations: long quotations taken from Jefferson’s best known writings – the Declaration of Independence, Virginia’s 1786 Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom – as well as his thoughts on education and slavery taken from a mixture of his letters and other writings. These aphorisms present the hero in “strong and clear lines.” One inclusion, “Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate that these people are to be free,” had particular importance for Southern segregationists in the decades to come. The dramatic engraving that ringed the dome of the memorial – “I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man” – was the capstone in the official government-subsidized sponsorship of the “heroic” image, the “Apostle of Liberty” version of Thomas Jefferson.³

² Ibid., vii.

³ Ibid., 431.

Victory over the totalitarian Axis powers further renewed interest in the historical Jefferson and his words, principles, and actions. This fervor manifested itself in the explosion of fresh studies of Jefferson, most particularly the launching of Dumas Malone's magisterial multi-volume biography. By the late 1940s, it seemed that the "heroic" marble pedestal upon which Jefferson stood was more secure than ever before.

This invulnerability, however, would turn out to be illusory. Although the postwar "Jeffersonian Surge," to borrow a term from Joseph Ellis, held sway for much of the early Cold War, cracks began to appear in the heroic mantle of the Sage of Monticello within only a few years. The Supreme Court's Brown v. the Board of Education decision outlawing racial segregation in public schools became a climactic event for white Southerners. One contemporary observer noted its historic significance: "Never has [the Supreme Court] handed down a decision which affected so deeply and so immediately the daily lives, the minds and hearts, of more Americans. Nor, in all probability, a decision more fraught with the peril of national division." The shock and disbelief that followed the May 17, 1954 ruling soon boiled over into rage. By the fall of 1955, Southern whites launched exhaustive searches for any solution that would protect their social systems and support their segregated way of life. Amid constitutional cries for states' rights and denouncements of government by judicial fiat, they stumbled across what they perceived as a powerful compatriot: Thomas Jefferson.⁴

⁴ Ibid., 454, 456-458; John Bartlow Martin, The Deep South Says "Never" (New York: Ballantine Books, 1957), 163.

After Brown, white segregationists attempted to “capture” Jefferson for their cause, and, in effect, held him hostage against the postwar vision of the Apostle of Liberty. Defenders of Jim Crow convinced Americans that, if alive, the Founding Father would support their side. They championed Jefferson as one of their greatest “heroes,” and chose carefully from Jefferson’s diverse legacy. In their legal efforts to block the implementation of school desegregation, they modeled their constitutional defenses on Jefferson’s Kentucky Resolutions; in their harangues and denunciations of the Supreme Court, they frequently quoted Jefferson’s suspicions of the judiciary; and in their efforts to convince the public that intermingling between the races would be horribly destructive to the white race, they invoked Jefferson’s thoughts on the inferiority of blacks. In the 1950s, Thomas Jefferson became a vital figure in the campaign to stave off desegregation in the South.

On the other side of the clash over black equality, civil rights leaders found themselves fighting a deeply entrenched white South, one that had called for “massive resistance” against the Brown decision. In the late 1950s and 1960s, leaders of the civil rights movement focused on a crusade of direct action and non-violent confrontation. Moreover, with the significant exception of Martin Luther King, Jr., civil rights leaders chose not to mine the American past for authoritative assistance in their campaign for social and civil equality. In the earlier years of the modern civil rights movement, outside of King’s important “I Have a Dream” speech and the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” invocations of Jefferson and the Founding Fathers were extremely rare. As a

growing sense of nationalism and militance influenced black civil rights groups in the later 1960s, discussions of the American past intensified, but they were critical of the traditional canon of American history and the memorialized version of Jefferson. Blacks seized on and decried the slaveholding image of Jefferson, while re-popularizing the narrative of his long-term affair with Sally Hemings.

Thus, by the late 1960s, the "heroic" image of Jefferson was under attack from both sides: on the far right, the unpopular and vilified segregationists who lionized Jefferson produced an uncomfortable taste in the mouths of historians and the larger American public; on the left, black leaders who had once supported the "heroic" image of the author of the Declaration of Independence now began to abandon it. The reaction of another group, the moderates and Jefferson historians, would prove equally significant to the future of Jefferson's image. For the most part, those who had the ammunition and the opportunity to defend Jefferson most effectively chose not to do so; by not "dignifying" their opponents with a response, they allowed them to flourish and continue.

This lack of a rejoinder would weigh heavily in the minds of several young scholars who formed their mature opinions about Jefferson and American history in the late 1950s and 1960s. Among these were scholars Winthrop Jordan, David Brion Davis, Martin Duberman, Robert McColley, and novelist Barbara Chase-Riboud. The writings of these intellectuals, along with a 1963 monograph by Leonard W. Levy, questioned the image of Jefferson represented by the Tidal Basin memorial. Their early criticisms, mirroring the inclusive, revisionist nature of 1960s historiography, sought to reveal some

of the dimensions of Thomas Jefferson ignored by the Memorial's official version through monographs such as Jefferson and Civil Liberties: the Darker Side and White Over Black. The debate over the accepted version of Jefferson continued in the 1970s with Fawn Brodie's bestseller Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History and with two immensely popular novels, Gore Vidal's Burr and Barbara Chase-Riboud's Sally Hemings.

By the 1990s, the relationship between Jefferson and Sally Hemings was widely accepted by the American public, and much of the "heroic" image lay in shards around the feet of the memorialized Jefferson. The ruin was too great for even acclaimed Jefferson scholars Dumas Malone and Merrill Peterson to attempt repair. By 1992, Thomas Jefferson was no longer an "untainted hero" on par with George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, as revealed by the consensus of a complex and somewhat flawed image that was reached at the Jefferson Legacies Conference at the University of Virginia. The roots of this revision, however, are found much earlier. Overlooked by Peterson in his 1960 book, The Jefferson Image in the American Mind, they were in the post-Brown South and the struggle that followed that decision.

The Segregationists Take a Hostage

On November 21, 1955, residents of Richmond, Virginia must have thought they had traveled back in time and awakened a century earlier. The Richmond News-Leader issue that greeted them that morning had huge portraits of nineteenth-century Southern heroes James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, along with oversized reprints of the 1798 Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions. The printing of the portraits coincided with News-Leader editor James Jackson Kilpatrick's launching of a massive constitutional attack on the Supreme Court's Brown decision. Based mainly on the Resolutions of 1798, Kilpatrick's campaign for "interposition" swept through the newspapers and legislatures of the South and attached the image of Thomas Jefferson to the attempt to protect states' rights and block federal usurpation of them.⁵

Kilpatrick's influential series of editorials, which ran from November 1955 through February 1956, held Jefferson as the standard bearer for "interposition." Although it would prove to be a futile attempt at resistance, "interposition" was an essential link between the segregationists and Thomas Jefferson. To link their fight against desegregation to Jefferson's powerful image, white Southerners also used two other portions of his legacy: the letters Jefferson wrote late in life expressing his

⁵ Richmond News-Leader, 21 November 1955.

suspensions of judiciary encroachments upon the Constitution, and his statements on the inferiority of blacks.

For the segregationists, these three topics constituted the “capture” of Jefferson, and supported their understanding that one of the most influential and important of the Founding Fathers had joined the battle on *their side*. Segregationists were convinced that Jefferson would have supported them because nearly all of their influential newspapers, books, and pamphlets told them so. All the major leaders of “massive resistance” – Senator Herman Talmadge, Mississippi Judge Tom Brady, Carleton Putnam, Senator James O. Eastland, and Richmond News-Leader editor James J. Kilpatrick – discussed the “true” views of Jefferson and what he would have made of the Brown decision. The mention of Jefferson filled Southern editorials throughout the mid-1950s; The Citizens Council newspaper invoked his name in nearly every issue. Along with Abraham Lincoln, another essential hostage due to his enormous popularity among blacks, Jefferson was a crucial historical figure in attempts to legitimize the segregationists’ campaign to block racial integration.

*

Virginia country lawyer William Old surely had no idea of the influence he would quickly have on Southern politics when he wrote a small pamphlet that dusted off a long-forgotten constitutional theory called interposition. Old argued that, under the compact theory of the Constitution, the thirteen states agreed to take part in the union that was mandated by the Constitution; it was not a contract with the American people, but instead

between the states. Therefore, the sovereign state legislatures could interpose their authority and protect their constituents from the encroachment of federal power. In the famous 1798 Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, Jefferson and James Madison had suggested this recourse in order to protect basic personal liberties against the Alien and Sedition Acts. These Resolutions formulated the bedrock for Old's argument. He asserted that states in both the North and South had used interposition throughout the nation's early history and that it was still a viable tool, despite the belief that Appomattox had made the theory irrelevant. By the end of 1955, this small, privately published booklet would come to have an enormous influence on Southern segregationists and legislators. After the Chesterfield County attorney's pamphlet found its way into the hands of a young, ambitious editor at the Richmond News-Leader, members of Congress even proclaimed interposition as "the barrier against tyranny."⁶

James Jackson Kilpatrick was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1920, but soon after graduating from the University of Missouri and taking his first job with the Richmond News-Leader in 1941, he adopted Virginia as his home. In the words of one historian of "massive resistance," Kilpatrick had become "more Virginian than Virginia." At the age of thirty-one, he became editor of the News-Leader, taking over from the enormously respected Douglass Southall Freeman, author of magisterial biographies of

⁶ William Old, The Segregation Issue: Suggestions Regarding the Maintenance of State Autonomy (Richmond: The Press of Lawyers Printing Company, 1955); see also Numan V. Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 129; John Bell Williams, "Interposition: The Barrier Against Tyranny," speech given in House of Representatives, January 25, 1956.

Robert E. Lee and George Washington. With the 1954 Brown decision, Kilpatrick's career as editor took a decisive turn. As one observer asserted, although Kilpatrick and the News-Leader initially "greeted the Supreme Court ruling ... with a conciliatory editorial and a suggested program of compliance, [they soon] changed quickly to an attitude of fierce hostility. By October, 1955, it had become probably the most resounding voice of resistance in the Southern press."⁷

Kilpatrick saw Old's doctrine of interposition as a legitimate and respectable escape for the South. Commentator Benjamin Muse documented Kilpatrick's epiphany: "To this zealous resister, groping for a formula, Old's paper was pure gold. He seized upon the idea and went to work in the spirit of a man with a historic mission." He began to amplify the country attorney's "golden" argument, beginning with the November 21, 1955 publishing of the portraits of Jefferson, Madison, and Calhoun, and not letting up until, by mid-1957, eight Southern state legislatures had passed resolutions of interposition. Kilpatrick's editorials depended heavily on historical precedent, especially the authoritative image of Thomas Jefferson, to prove his argument. According to Kilpatrick, "Jefferson and Madison did prophesy a time when the Federal government might usurp powers not granted it. And in such an emergency, these great men declared, The States may declare the inherent right ... this is the *right of interposition*."⁸

⁷ Benjamin Muse, Virginia's Massive Resistance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*; Bartley, 131; Richmond News-Leader, 22 November 1955; Richmond News-Leader, 28 November 1955.

The Richmond News-Leader's crusade was impressive, powerful, and influential. In the words of Southern School News, a newsmagazine dedicated to chronicling the story of school integration, "after six weeks and fifty thousand words in the News-Leader, the strange new word 'interposition' had entered the vocabulary of most adult Virginians and of politicians all across the South." A Northern paper described Kilpatrick's editorials as "brilliant and forceful writing," and asserted that the "public response brought more than 11,000 requests for reprints within a matter of weeks, not only from the South but from other parts of the country as well." Kilpatrick had taken William Old's doctrine and turned it into a tour-de-force for the Southern position.⁹

Although the actual theory of interposition depended more heavily on the ways in which Calhoun had adapted the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, Kilpatrick seized upon Jefferson and Madison because of their greater status in American culture. Further, Kilpatrick repeatedly emphasized that the need for interposition was not due solely to the fight for racial segregation. He argued that "school segregation, however critical a problem it may be right now, is not the overriding problem. The transcendent issue lies in finding some *effective* check upon encroachments by the Federal judiciary upon the reserve powers of the States." By arguing that the problem was much bigger than segregation, Kilpatrick gave the segregationists a more respectable weapon.¹⁰

Two crucial aspects of interposition were central to understanding the popularity that it enjoyed in the mid-1950s. First, it avoided segregation and concentrated on the far

⁹ Southern School News 1 (March 1956): 10; Christian Science Monitor, 9 May 1956.

¹⁰ Richmond News-Leader, 30 December 1955. Italics in original text.

less controversial legalistic issues. This was vital, in the words of historian James Ely, because “not only would interposition raise the state rights question so dear to the hearts of many Virginia conservatives, ... [but] a constitutional approach would gain more sympathy in the North than overt racial arguments for segregation.” Although it kept racism out of the spotlight, the veil was paper-thin. Throughout the anti-Brown campaign in the South, no states’ rights advocate also recommended voluntary racial integration *by a state*. Segregationists fought the encroachments of the federal government, but they made no efforts to take on desegregation on their own. The second important aspect of interposition centered on employing powerful historical precedent. A 1955 political cartoon clearly evidenced the importance of this historical testimony. The cartoon, entitled “Lighting the Way,” featured a Virginia gentleman reading legislation at a desk lit by two candles marked Jefferson and Madison (see Appendix, figure 1). Further, Kilpatrick emphasized historical authority in fully reprinting the 1798 Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions and Madison’s Report of 1799.¹¹

James Kilpatrick was not alone in raising the standard of interposition. Other southern editors instantly fell into ranks behind the Virginian editor and resoundingly supported the theory in their papers. In the Charleston, South Carolina News and Courier, editor Thomas Waring followed Kilpatrick’s lead in deftly invoking Jefferson, and in keeping attention away from the defiance of integration. Only three days after

¹¹ James W. Ely, The Crisis of Conservative Virginia: The Byrd Organization and the Politics of Massive Resistance (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 42; Richmond News-Leader, 28 November 1955.

Kilpatrick's initial assault, Waring's editorial "Bigger Than the Race Problem" argued that, if looking into the past for fundamental principles,

where better should they look than to ... Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, architect of American liberty and one of the great political thinkers of all time? Is Jefferson out of date? If so, the American Republic is dead. He lived in times even more dangerous than today. We believe that his words still live.

Like his Richmond colleague, Waring also printed this editorial alongside of a complete reprint of Jefferson's Kentucky Resolutions.¹²

Still other Southern newspapers featured editorials that argued that interposition had great merit simply because Jefferson was the originator of this doctrine. In the Jackson Daily News, for instance, when asked if "there is any higher ground upon which they could stand than the asserted sovereignty of their state," the response relied simply on the Founding Fathers' authority: "No. They would be in company of people like Jefferson and Madison, and that is concededly good company." The bold headline in the March 11, 1956 Birmingham News read "First Invoked by Jefferson - Interposition and Nullification Rooted Deep in U.S. History." In agreement, the Atlanta Journal published an article entitled "'Interposition' the Rage, Goes Back to Jefferson," which reported that segregationists were "turning back the pages of history to the days of Thomas Jefferson in their search for legal means to disregard the Supreme Court's racial integration orders." A further example of the centrality of Jefferson to the segregationists' efforts to preserve their Jim Crow system appeared in Columbia, South Carolina's The State. In a January 12, 1956 article, the author argued that "advocates of the doctrine of interposition

¹² Charleston News and Courier, 24 November 1955.

cite historical precedent as one of their strongest arguments. In so doing, they are able to claim some prominent historical figures as predecessors, among them Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.”¹³

According to historian Numan Bartley, “during the winter of 1955-1956, interposition became almost a magic panacea; an act that, like conversion, would lead inevitably to salvation.” Throughout the entire South in 1956, editors packed their columns with descriptions and definitions of the interposition doctrine and the constitutional jargon it entailed. Two Washington Evening-Star reporters aptly described the volume of the campaign, admitting “reams of copy have been carried by the press in recent weeks concerning ‘interposition.’”¹⁴

The interposition crusade gained critical attention in the North and throughout the nation precisely because it was, in the words of one historian, “the theory and battle cry of massive resistance.” The Christian Science Monitor, for example, described Kilpatrick’s “sensational editorial campaign” as a “forceful, hard-punching series of editorials that were destined to have a tremendous impact on Virginia’s resistance to integration. In fact, it was to change the whole course of it.” In the span of a few months, the “tremendous impact” of the Southern editors’ passionate crusade, their “magic panacea,” manifested itself in the halls of state capitals across the South and in the United States Congress.¹⁵

¹³ Jackson Daily News, 24 January 1956; Birmingham News, 11 March 1956; Atlanta Journal, 10 January 1956; The State (Columbia, South Carolina), 12 January 1956.

¹⁴ Bartley, 127; Washington Evening-Star, 17 February 1956.

¹⁵ Christian Science Monitor, 9 May 1956.

The campaign for interposition waged by Southern newspaper editors quickly gained powerful friends who also looked for a respectable way to resist the Supreme Court's ruling. Among these supporters were the collective bodies of most Southern state legislatures, and several influential Congressmen, including Virginia Senator Harry Flood Byrd, Georgia Senator Herman Talmadge, and Mississippi Representative John Bell Williams. According to historian Benjamin Muse, within a few short weeks after the Virginia campaign for interposition began, "the five [other] Southern states whose legislatures were in session in January 1956 raced to adopt resolutions of interposition in one form or another." The Deep South states that drafted pronouncements, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi and Virginia, borrowed several phrases verbatim from Jefferson's and Madison's 1798 resolutions. Texas, Arkansas, and Florida lawmakers would follow suit during the summer of 1956, and the legislatures of Tennessee and North Carolina passed resolutions protesting the Supreme Court decision. Thanks in part to the historical precedent set by Jefferson and Madison the South found common ground on which to defy the desegregation order.¹⁶

Southern Congressmen, especially those from the Deep South, widely expressed their opinions on the Supreme Court ruling. Mississippi Congressmen James Eastland and John Bell Williams frequently lectured in the chambers of Congress on the merits of interposition. In an extensively reprinted address, "Interposition, the Barrier Against Tyranny," John Bell Williams detailed the finer points and historical precedents of

¹⁶ Benjamin Muse, Ten Years of Prelude: The Story of Integration Since the Supreme Court's 1954 Decision (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 71-72.

interposition, concluding his lengthy remarks with a dual invocation of God and Thomas Jefferson: "The same God that watched over Jefferson, and inspired him to swear eternal hostility to tyranny watches over us. With His Divine guidance and help we shall not fail." Eastland wrote statements to be released in Mississippi newspapers praising interposition as an "effective weapon" given to the state by Thomas Jefferson, and asking the state legislature to unsheathe said weapon. Virginia Senator Harry Flood Byrd warmly supported Kilpatrick's "masterly exposition," and saw interposition as the appropriate path to successful resistance. Historian Ronald Heinemann argued that Byrd was "seduced" by the "rhetorical flair, constitutional arguments and historical foundations" of the young editor's campaign. Senator Byrd was the leading opponent of the Brown decision who personally coined the term "massive resistance." According to Francis Wilhoit, Byrd, "more than any other single individual, determined the shape and style of the movement as it evolved in the decade after 1954." With powerful friends such as these respected Congressmen unreservedly promoting interposition, it is no small wonder that in the South "enthusiasm among the ranks was high, and in 1956 it burgeoned into euphoria."¹⁷

Interposition indeed reached its zenith in the latter months of 1956. While the majority of Southern states drafted formal remonstrances against the Court, no concerted

¹⁷ John Bell Williams, "Interposition, the Barrier Against Tyranny" (Jackson, MS: Citizens Council of America, 1957), 16; Jackson Daily News, 11 December 1955; "massive resistance" quote in New York Times, 26 February 1956; Ronald L. Heinemann, Harry Byrd of Virginia (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 332; Francis Wilhoit, The Politics of Massive Resistance (New York: George Braziller, 1973), 76, 117.

attempt to enforce the Brown decision had been attempted in the fall, leading one historian to comment that “many whites now came to believe that racial integration could be checked in toto.” Thanks to Kilpatrick’s amplification of the interposition doctrine, Southern whites felt as if they had successfully staved off what to them seemed to be a serious cultural crisis. This false sense of security and hope would last until the fall of 1957 when a heretofore silent President Eisenhower decided to send federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce publicly the desegregation of Central High School. The Little Rock crisis was the fatal blow to interposition and to the South’s confidence that it could legally and “respectably” escape federally ordered integration.¹⁸

The final salvo in the debate over interposition came again from its originator, James Jackson Kilpatrick, only this time in a much quieter fashion. Not satisfied with the newspaper forum his interposition editorials dominated throughout 1955 and 1956, in 1957 Kilpatrick published The Sovereign States: Notes of a Citizen of Virginia. As is suggested by the title – a less-than-subtle adaptation of Jefferson’s 1784 Notes on the State of Virginia – Kilpatrick again espoused all the details of the theory with which he had become so closely associated. The familiar Kilpatrick invocations of Jefferson, again, lay at the heart of this polemic for states’ rights. He included an entire chapter on the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, a discussion of the compact theory of the Constitution, and a re-reading of the Declaration of Independence, during which he proclaimed that “it had opened, this Declaration, as an enunciation of what often are

¹⁸ Ely, 42.

termed the 'human rights,' but it concluded, in the plainest terms, as a pronouncement of [the] political powers ... of newly created states." Nearly all of the arguments in The Sovereign States were simply a literary rehashing, of his prior editorials on interposition and states' rights. Because of the author's respected status among Southern extremists, however, The Sovereign States, along with Kilpatrick's later book The Southern Case for School Segregation (1962), became significant volumes in the panoply of segregationist writings, thereby linking again the image of Thomas Jefferson to the campaign of "massive resistance."¹⁹

Kilpatrick possessed an amazing ability to gauge political trends. Just one year after publishing The Southern Case for School Segregation, he wrote an essay in 100 Years of Emancipation in which he all but recanted any segregationist views. In his essay "View from a Southern Exposure," Kilpatrick admitted that

The Southerner has done a lot of thinking these past few years, especially since the hurricane winds of Brown v. Board of Education swept over the South and threatened to blow the house of his fathers clean away. Most storms seem to be worse, in the midst of them, then they are seen when the flood waters ebb.... I have a feeling that many Southerners who share my own tastes, convictions, prejudices, upbringing, and conservative traditions have been reflecting long and powerfully about where we have been, and whither we are going.... we are beginning to think about some of the things we have left undone which we ought to have done and some of the things we have done which we ought not to have done.... We are looking at things differently.

¹⁹ James J. Kilpatrick, The Sovereign States: Notes of a Citizen of Virginia (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1957), 4; James J. Kilpatrick, The Southern Case for School Segregation (New York: Crowell-Collier Publishers, 1962).

Before even a decade had passed, one of the most strident defenders of segregation had already admitted wrong doing. Nevertheless, by 1963 interposition and “massive resistance” had already done severe damage to both the South and the Jefferson image.²⁰

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The crux of the interposition argument actually turned on an indictment of the Supreme Court. The denunciation of the Warren Court for wielding encroaching and unlawful power quickly became a cottage industry in the mid-1950s South. It pervaded Kilpatrick’s numerous editorials; Southern legislatures included it in their resolutions of interposition; and segregationist speakers wove it into their rhetoric. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren quickly became the South’s Public Enemy Number One. Former Virginia governor Bill Tuck went as far as to call the Court “nine reprehensible individuals gasconading in judicial ermine.”²¹

Warren’s name became so besmirched that the Richmond Times-Dispatch suggested that the name of Warren County, Virginia, named for Revolutionary War hero Dr. Joseph Warren, should be changed “in view of painful latter-day associations” with the Chief Justice’s surname. The article further pointed out that “Thomas Jefferson’s attitude toward the Supreme Court, and his feeling that that tribunal was usurping authority, are well known,” so, “it’s OK by us if the good people of Warren want to

²⁰ James Jackson Kilpatrick, “View from a Southern Exposure,” 100 Years of Emancipation, ed. Robert A. Goldwin (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1963), 119-120.

²¹ William B. Crawley, Bill Tuck: A Political Life in Harry Byrd’s Virginia (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 223.

change their county's name to Jefferson." Both the hatred for Warren and the embrace of Jefferson's almost oracular views on the judiciary are evident even in this minor article.²²

This larger issue of perceived judicial tyranny that Southern segregationist leaders used to attack the Brown decision provided another link to the image of Jefferson. The method of defending segregation by assailing the Court shared fundamental elements with interposition: it too placed an emphasis on history and diverted attention away from the "uglier" racial issue. This theme of decrying the alleged despotic rule of nine men, "the transcendent issue" according to Kilpatrick, quickly became the most often used armament in the segregationist arsenal, and one that would repeatedly invoke the letters Jefferson wrote late in his life in which he expressed his aversion toward the judiciary.²³

These writings consist of a series of seven letters Jefferson wrote from 1819 to 1823 to Virginia Judge Spencer Roane, newspaper editor Thomas Ritchie, Charles Hammond and others. Segregationist newspaper articles and public addresses widely printed and excerpted quotes from these letters in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. Among the more famous of Jefferson's denunciations used by the segregationists were his description of Constitution as "a mere thing of wax in the hands of the judiciary, which they may twist and shape into any form they please," and his view that the "judiciary of the United States is the subtle corps of sappers and miners constantly

²² Richmond Times-Dispatch, 17 September 1958.

²³ Kilpatrick's label of "the transcendent issue" in Richmond News Leader, 20 November 1955, 21 November 1955, 23 November 1955.

working under ground to undermine the foundations of our confederated fabric.” A third Jeffersonian description was a celebrated quotation featured throughout anti-Brown propaganda came from his March 9, 1821 letter to Judge Spencer Roane, which accused the federal judicial branch of “like gravity, ever acting, with noiseless foot, and unalarming advance gaining ground step by step, and holding what it gains is engulfing insidiously the special governments into the jaws of that which feeds them ... Let the eye of vigilance never be closed.” From this pool of Jefferson’s anti-judiciary sentiments, the segregationists formulated a strong link between his writings and the current crisis.²⁴

Jefferson became for the Jim Crow defenders a prophet who had predicted the current judicial crisis they now faced. Newspapers proclaimed the Virginian as a clairvoyant; “Jefferson Foresaw it!” proclaimed the Jackson Daily News. The article, which ran on the second anniversary of the Brown decision, announced that Jefferson “foresaw this present day when the Supreme Court would be trying to take over the function of lawmaking instead of law interpreting.” This image of Jefferson as prophet appeared throughout segregationist literature, pro-resistance newspaper columns, and speeches by several prominent Southern politicians.²⁵

²⁴ For full text of these letters see The Works of Thomas Jefferson (Federal edition) ed. Paul Leicester Ford, vol. 12 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905): TJ to Spencer Roane, 9 March 1819, 135-139; TJ to William Jarvis, 28 September 1820, 161-163; TJ to Thomas Ritchie, 25 December 1820, 175-178; TJ to Archibald Thweat, 19 January 1821, 196-197; TJ to Spencer Roane 9 March 1821, 201-202; TJ to Nathaniel Macon, 19 August 1821, 206-208; TJ to William Johnson 4 March 1823, 277-280. Quotations from TJ to Spencer Roane 9 March 1819, 137; TJ to Thomas Ritchie, 25 December 1820, 177; TJ to Spencer Roane, 9 March 1821, 201-202. Jefferson’s August 18, 1821 letter to Charles Hammond in The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, eds. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, vol. 15 (Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), 330-333.

²⁵ Jackson Daily News, 17 May 1956.

Newspaper articles employed fantastic imagery: "We may recall the prophetic works of Jefferson..." or "Thomas Jefferson long ago warned..." Mystical invocations of this nature even appeared in letters written to the editors of Southern papers. One letter to the Arkansas Gazette angrily tried to set the Jeffersonian record straight: "Thomas Jefferson was no weasel-mouth, no evasive double-talker who said things 'in effect' or 'in substance.' He was clear, concise, and relentlessly bitter and vehement in this denunciation of the usurpation of authority by the High Court." The Birmingham News' "Voice of the People" section announced on January 9, 1957, that "Jefferson's Prophecy Has Been Fulfilled." A third letter, "Glory of the Constitution is All Gone," revealed the fatalistic emotions that Southerners expressed about the Court decision, and offered a distressing suggestion: "What the country needs above everything else is a second Jefferson to devise a remedy for the evil which the first Jefferson foresaw."²⁶

This version of the clairvoyant Jefferson also permeated the statements and speeches of prominent segregationist leaders and Southern political sympathizers. Georgia Senator Richard B. Russell appealed to Jefferson's views on the judiciary in his address to the National Daughters of the American Revolution. The famous governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, also quoted at length from Jefferson's 1821 letter to Charles Hammond in a malignant condemnation of the Supreme Court in 1959. Georgia Senator Herman Talmadge, in a June 1957 address, cited one of the seven oft-quoted Jefferson statements on the judiciary: "The Supreme Court, as Jefferson predicted, is 'like a thief in

²⁶ Richmond News-Leader, 14 November 1955; Charleston News and Courier, 17 November 1955; Arkansas Gazette, 18 July 1955; Arkansas Gazette, 10 July 1955.

the night' stealing away the liberties of our people." A year later at a celebrated Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner in Richmond, Virginia, Talmadge further developed his mystical Jefferson linkage by proclaiming that "in all history of mankind no mortal possessed greater vision than Jefferson. He foresaw the very abuses of power which make us a country divided today." These comments reprised statements about the judiciary Senator Talmadge had already made in his influential 1955 book You and Segregation.²⁷

One of the most widely read segregationist tracts, Talmadge's forty-eight page You and Segregation, dedicated a significant portion of his chapter on "the Supreme Court and the Constitution" to Jefferson. Tapping into established themes, Talmadge argued that "as far back as 1821 Thomas Jefferson realized the danger inherent in the United States Supreme Court..." and that "the warning of Jefferson has become prophecy fulfilled." Another book published at the height of the fight to resist integration summoned Jeffersonian authority in his jeremiad against the high Court. William D. Workman's The Case for the South called on Jefferson's letters to Spencer Roane and Thomas Ritchie to support his accusations that Chief Justice Warren "refused to clutter [his Brown opinion] with legal precedent" and thereby fulfilled Jefferson's predictions. Workman applied a further Jeffersonian example in his confident statement that

there is an increasing awareness of Americans everywhere that the Supreme Court is embarked upon a course which threatens the very principles upon which the nation was

²⁷ Copy of speech in Facts on File Series 1, Roll 39; Copy of speech in Facts on File Series 2, Reel 13; Atlanta Constitution, 19 June 1957; Copy of speech in Facts on File Series 1, Roll 13; Herman Talmadge, You and Segregation (Birmingham, AL: Vulcan Press, 1955).

founded. But unless other Americans follow the lead of Southerners in guarding against the subversion of both the Constitution and the Congress, they may see the truth of Jefferson's warnings against the federal judiciary...²⁸

Those who conjured the image of Jefferson as prophet simply lifted passages and quotations from his letters without adding much interpretation or analysis; they certainly never explained that Jefferson's words might have been written in entirely different contexts, or as historians Adrienne Koch and Harry Ammon noted in 1948, as efforts to protect personal liberty rather than to deny it. For convincing Southerners and Americans alike that the Supreme Court was in error, however, the very fact that segregationists could invoke the writings of a revered American hero was authority enough. Simply lifting Jefferson's words and applying them to the current debate, Southern extremists linked the Founding Father to massive resistance. One ardent opponent of integration, known as "Mr. Segregation of the South," masterfully applied this technique in a newspaper that he single-handedly created, funded, and edited.²⁹

V.O. Key, in his seminal Southern Politics in State and Nation, described Roy V. Harris as "Georgia's most prominent and energetic political manager." James Cook, in a fawning 1962 book profiling segregationist leaders, also commented that Harris "had a strong voice in the governing of Georgia for almost forty years ... It seemed very likely that he would one day become at least governor of that state – and perhaps go even higher than that." Roy Harris' main project throughout the late 1950s and 1960s was the

²⁸ Talmadge, 11-12; William D. Workman, The Case for the South (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1960), 26, 38.

²⁹ Adrienne Koch and Harry Ammon, "The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions: An Episode in Jefferson's and Madison's Defense of Civil Liberties," William and Mary Quarterly 3rd Series 5 (April 1948): 146-176; James Graham Cook, The Segregationists (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), 101.

Augusta Courier, a weekly newspaper dedicated to disseminating segregationist propaganda. Harris frequently evoked the issue of Jefferson and the judiciary simply by reprinting his words in a section called "Cracks and Otherwise." Here "the most feared man in Georgia politics" printed selections from Jefferson's letters denouncing the Court when he needed small sections to fill the partially blank newspaper columns if a story did not run long enough. Harris displayed Jefferson's assertions prominently, along with added quotes from Abraham Lincoln and other authority figures that segregationists deemed important.³⁰

The power of the Jefferson image, and the ease with which Southern politicians and segregationist rhetoricians could fill their discourse with his writings, meant that the method of lifting Jefferson's words from his letters without context or explanation was employed widely and frequently. By the mid to late 1960s, denouncing the evil Supreme Court and linking this rhetoric to Thomas Jefferson had become segregationist tradition. Alabama governor and presidential candidate George Corley Wallace, who came to prominence during the final stages of massive resistance, inherited this rhetorical technique. Governor Wallace quoted Jefferson's words in his 1963 inaugural address, and he spent several pages detailing Jefferson's prophetic views on the judiciary in his 1976 book Stand Up for America. The fact that Wallace dedicated considerable space to

³⁰ V.O. Key, Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1949), 124; Workman, 101, 108; The Augusta Courier, 4 March 1957, 25 March 1957, 23 September 1957, 23 February 1959, 14 January 1963, 28 September 1964; Bartley, 43.

continuing the argument a full decade after the campaign to resist integration had been defunct suggests how seemingly permanent this view had become.³¹

Segregationists “captured” the symbol of Jefferson a third way by focusing on his racial views. Walter Lord, best-selling author of several books, including the best work on the 1912 Titanic sinking, the battle of the Alamo, and a 1965 study of Southern resistance to desegregation, wrote that “history was ransacked for quotes from great Americans; [and] there were those remarks by Jefferson, clearly indicating that he did not think the Negro was mentally equal to the white...” From the first days after Brown, attachment to Jefferson’s few statements on black inferiority became official segregationist policy. In light of Jefferson’s popular image as the egalitarian enemy of slavery, promoted so reverently in the postwar celebration of the Apostle of Liberty, asserting that Jefferson was a racist who instead saw blacks as inferior was a potentially treacherous position for Southern whites. Therefore, these allegations, that the segregationists knew the “truth” about Jefferson, were made in slightly less overt arenas. That they were not shouted from every rooftop, as with Jefferson’s views of the judiciary or his founding of interposition, does not mean that they were not present, but that they

³¹ George C. Wallace, Stand Up for America (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976), 69, 70, 75, 82, 135-136.

were prominent only in the most rabid yet influential segregationist books and newspapers, and recited by the most orthodox of resistance leaders.³²

The “truth” about Jefferson that segregationist rhetoricians boasted of exclusively understanding focused on their insistence that they knew what he really meant in the famed preamble to the Declaration of Independence. They also took pride in publicly expressing “Jefferson’s true views” on the inferiority of blacks, and in disclosing the evil liberal “secret” that they argued lay behind an incomplete inscription in the sacred Jefferson Memorial. In the words of historian Neil McMillen, “when subjected to the selective mining of the organized resistance movement,” Jefferson’s writings “bore a rich ore capable of being hammered into a flimsy armor for white supremacy.”³³

The most significant groups to forge and wear this racial armor were the enormously influential Citizens Councils that attracted immense numbers of whites across the South in the wake of Brown. According to one historian of massive resistance, “by far the most influential molders of the movement of resistance to desegregation were the organizations which sprang up in every Southern state and ... coagulated in what became the ‘Citizens Councils of America, Inc.’” For Delta Democrat-Times editor Hodding Carter, the Council movement provided the South with the cement that unified “almost the entire region ... within the space of little more than a year in ‘massive

³² Walter Lord, The Past That Would Not Die (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 86. Lord also points out that the segregationists did not mention Jefferson’s thoughts on how, given freedom for a few generations, blacks could indeed “catch up” to the white man’s intellectual ability and cultural advances.

³³ Neil McMillen, The Citizens Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 181.

resistance' to any integration whatsoever." Founded just two months after the Court handed down the Brown decision by former Mississippi State University football player-turned-planter, Robert Patterson, Citizens Councils soon spread like wildfire out of the Delta and across the Deep South. By 1957, Council leadership boasted nearly a quarter of a million members who comprised, according to Numan Bartley, "the 'Jesuits' of the white supremacy creed, the cadres of massive resistance."³⁴

As white Southern liberals and members of the NAACP quickly learned, the Councils wielded tremendous pressure to control information, to shape community mores, and to enforce conformity to their points of view. The reason for their supremacy and vast popularity lay in the demographic makeup of the Councils. Hodding Carter argued that the Councils' success lay in the fact that "its local and state leadership is drawn primarily from the ranks of the white community's business, political and social leadership." With its strong middle-class base, the "manicured Klan" or "uptown Ku Klux Klan," as they were derisively labeled, held unquestioned power over their local communities; this ensured that any agenda or argument advanced by official Council authorities would be seriously received and digested in communities all across the South.³⁵

The great achievement of the Citizens Councils, other than acting as the catalyst that unified the South, was its campaign to disseminate information in the form of various

³⁴ Muse, Ten Years of Prelude, 47; Hodding Carter III, The South Strikes Back (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1959), 17, 30; McMillen, 19; Bartley, 84.

³⁵ Carter, 196-197.

pamphlets, reprinted speeches of segregationists and political sympathizers, and packets of sundry anti-integration propaganda including collections of "Famous Quotations." From the very beginning, in the second paragraph ever published by the Citizens Councils, Jefferson's words were used to support segregationist arguments. In an eight-page pamphlet described by John Bartlow Martin as "unembellished [and] as dignified as any corporate report," founder Robert Patterson's first publication offered a bold statement: "If we are bigoted, prejudiced, un-American, etc., so were George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and our other illustrious forebears who believed in segregation."³⁶

The Citizens Council, the official newspaper of the Citizens Council of America, continued to attach Jefferson's ideas to current racial debates. Beginning in February 1957, the Councils began to address a new audience: the children who would be going to schools with blacks if the Warren Court had its way. "A Manual for Southerners" appeared in two editions in The Citizens Council, one for third and fourth graders, a second for fifth and sixth, in an attempt to correct those children who had been "progressively educated." The "manual" for fifth and sixth graders included headings entitled "George Washington Wouldn't Like Race-Mixers" and "Jefferson Said Races Could Not Share One Country." Contained under this heading and aimed at a ten-year-old audience was a paraphrased summary of the single most important Jefferson quotation segregationists employed:

³⁶ Robert Patterson, The Citizens Council (Privately printed by Winona, Mississippi Citizens Council, 1955), 1; Martin, 22.

Do you remember Thomas Jefferson? He wrote our Declaration of Independence. He didn't believe in mixing the races just as Lincoln didn't. And he was against setting the Negro free among white people. He wanted the Negro to have his own country back where he came from. The Negro would be much happier in his own land where he could have his own government, his doctors, dentists, lawyers, businessmen, and cities. Then he would feel at home. He would not feel different and strange among his own people. Jefferson said that when both races are free, they cannot share the same country in peace.

Blotters stuffed into each new member's "welcome packet" tied Jefferson even more tightly to the Councils. Everyone who recently joined the Citizens Council received a folder of "educational materials" from the national headquarters in Mississippi. Among the various leaflets and reprinted speeches were a set of "Famous Quotations" which expressed the pro-segregationist maxims of Theodore Bilbo, Henry Grady, James Byrnes, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Jefferson. The well-known quotation of Jefferson's came from his Autobiography, and it occupied a prominent place in segregationist propaganda (see Appendix, figure 2).³⁷

This excerpt is among those immortalized in the panels that ring the Jefferson Memorial; during the late 1950s and early 1960s it became a touchstone of segregationist racial argument. William Workman described the quotation as "one of the most glaring examples of deliberate pro-Negro distortions of the truth." According to Southern extremists, the Memorial designers purposely twisted Jefferson's "true views" through the manipulation of a punctuation mark. In his unfinished Autobiography, Jefferson wrote, "nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than these people are to be free." This is the entirety of the selection in the Tidal Basin memorial panel. As

³⁷ The Citizens Council 2 (February 1957), 1-2, quote from page 1; The Citizens Council 2 (March 1957), 1-3; The Citizens Council 2 (April 1957), 1, quote from page 1.

segregationists passionately pointed out, however, the punctuation mark Jefferson used at the end of those apparently glowing anti-slavery words was not a period – it was a semi-colon. The remainder of that sentence severely repudiates any integrationist message: “Nor is it less certain, that the two races, equally free, can not live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion has drawn indelible lines of distinction between them.” According to one letter to the Richmond News-Leader, “the reason Mr. Jefferson’s words are not widely known is that, when quoting him on his beautiful monument’s inscription at Washington, these ten words were deliberately left out and thrown out the window, so to speak, and only half of the sentence he wrote was used – a period where the great Jefferson had put a semi-colon!”³⁸

This full passage comprised the ubiquitous Citizens Council’s “Famous Quotation” from Jefferson; scores of other segregationist and even white supremacist publications seized upon it as well. “Jefferson’s Thought Was Twisted into Race Lie on D.C. Monument” appeared in the pro-Jim Crow paper The Virginian, while Roy Harris furthered his connections to the Jefferson image in The Augusta Courier by detailing the Memorial quotation issue in “The Race Mixers Stoop Low,” and “Is Segregation Un-American?” Perhaps most telling of the cultural depth to which these arguments reached in the South is their inclusion in white supremacist propaganda. In The Thunderbolt, whose masthead declares it “the official White Racial organ of the National States Rights Party,” a page-length article was dedicated to strengthening this tie between Jefferson and

³⁸ Workman, 58; Quote from The Autobiography in Ford Vol. 1, 77; Richmond News-Leader, 7 September 1960.

racist ideology. Along with the usual reprinting of the Autobiography quotation, the Thunderbolt article set its sights on the sacred Declaration of Independence, calling it “a white man’s document.” The Thunderbolt further proclaimed that

Jefferson it is true did not believe Negroes should be slaves, but he was equally strong in the belief that they should never be citizens either. Therefore when he wrote ‘all men are created equal’... he simply did not think it necessary to explain that he was referring to white men, and not to the gibbering sub-human wretches being unloaded even then from African slave ships.

Polemical tracts, comprising the main thrust of segregationist defense, also concentrated on making the South and the nation aware of Jefferson’s “true views” on racial inferiority. These books, especially Tom Brady’s Black Monday, Carleton Putnam’s Race and Reason: A Yankee View and the work of Nathaniel Weyl, advanced arguments similar to those of the venomous white supremacists and, shockingly, often employing comparable language.³⁹

Described by University of Mississippi historian James Silver as the “metaphysician of the master racists,” Judge Tom Brady gave a speech to the Greenwood, Mississippi, Sons of the American Revolution just six days after the Supreme Court handed down the Brown decision. By July 1954, he had expanded and published the address as Black Monday: Segregation or Amalgamation ...America Has its Choice. It would prove to be an incredibly influential ninety-page volume, containing, according to one pro-segregation commentator, “the seeds of nearly all the major programs and philosophies that have been adopted by segregationist organizations since

³⁹ The Virginian 2 (January 1956): 4; Augusta Courier, 29 August 1955, 2; 27 May 1957, 3; The Thunderbolt (September 1961): 5.

1954.” It became the Bible of the Citizens Council movement and Brady, a Yale graduate and University of Mississippi trained lawyer, became “the godfather” to the segregationist movement, eventually rising to the Mississippi Supreme Court in 1963.⁴⁰

Tom Brady’s imagery in Black Monday was reminiscent of that in The Thunderbolt article. Brady first delved into anthropology and American history to prove black inferiority, establishing a path that the majority of future segregationist rhetoricians would follow. He remarked that “when Jefferson was composing the Declaration of Independence and wrote that it was evident that all men are created equal, he did not even remotely consider the negro [sic] slaves he had purchased, domesticated, and was watching from the veranda of his home, as being men. They were primitive savages, and wholly beyond the consideration of our Founding Fathers.” Even further, Brady declared that blacks had “made no contributions toward the nation whatsoever” although they “had been in this country approximately 150 years.” The Mississippi judge concluded his polemic with a condemnation of the Supreme Court, again using Jeffersonian authority and prophecy for proof.⁴¹

One year after the appearance of Black Monday, Herman Talmadge, former governor of Georgia and future United States Senator, wrote a small book entitled You and Segregation that, along with Brady’s, would be an essential addition to segregationists’ reading lists and library shelves. The prominent Southern politician

⁴⁰ James W. Silver, Mississippi: The Closed Society (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), 25; McMillen, 17-18; Cook, 14.

⁴¹ Tom P. Brady, Black Monday: Segregation or Amalgamation ... America Has Its Choice (Jackson: Citizens Council of America, 1955), 13, 90.

ended his book with the heading, "Jefferson's True Views," which rehashed the Jefferson Memorial "punctuation issue," while proclaiming that "certainly it is an indisputable historical fact that Jefferson ... favored segregation of the races in every phase of life."⁴²

A third significant book that "captured" the image of Jefferson was Carleton Putnam's 1961 Race and Reason: A Yankee View. One contemporary observer noted that "among Deep Southerners probably the most popular pro-segregation book since the publication of Brady's Black Monday and Talmadge's You and Segregation in the mid-1950s has been Carleton Putnam's Race and Reason." Putnam's book became so highly-regarded that Governor Ross Barnett proclaimed October 26, 1961 "Race and Reason Day" in the state of Mississippi. Legislators in Louisiana found it so compelling that they passed a resolution during the 1961 summer session ordering state high schools to require "selected mature students" to study Race and Reason. Putnam's subtitle – "A Yankee View" – explains why Southern segregationists embraced and welcomed his book. As Walter Lord argued in The Past that Would Not Die, part of the problem Southerners experienced in trying to keep the Court ruling from being implemented lay in the fact that it was deemed a sectional issue. "Gradually it became clear that if the drive for respectability was ever to succeed, ... [one] ingredient was essential: a good Yankee to

⁴² Talmadge, 48-49.

present the case.” Putnam fit this role perfectly; he claimed Revolutionary War hero Israel Putnam as an ancestor and had “an impeccable New England background.”⁴³

In Race and Reason, Putnam answered the question “was not American democracy founded on the idea of the equality of all men?” by parroting the common segregationist viewpoint on the Declaration of Independence. He also followed convention by discussing the Jefferson Memorial “punctuation debate.” Putnam furthered his linkage to Jefferson by relating the origins of the Democratic Party, an organization he argued “glorifies Jefferson yet would force on the South conditions which would make Jefferson turn in his grave.” Putnam’s last mention of Jefferson came as part of his answer to the question of how Southerners could make the North realize the South’s situation. He responded by in turn asking several rhetorical questions, including, “Did Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson ... or any other great statesman of our past, or any Supreme Court in our history prior to Earl Warren’s, favor forcing social integration on the South or consider that its customs in this respect were a denial of equal opportunity or contrary to any other American ideals?”⁴⁴

Other authors, chiefly Nathaniel Weyl, also cited Jefferson to support their arguments that blacks were inferior. Weyl’s The Negro in American Civilization, published in 1960 by the same press that brought forth Putnam as well as Peter Carmichael’s The South and Segregation, constituted the most extensive exposition on

⁴³ Cook, 352; Ibid., note 1; also I.A. Newby, Challenge to the Court: Social Scientists and the Defense of Segregation, 1954-1966 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 165-166; Lord, 88.

⁴⁴ Carleton Putnam, Race and Reason: A Yankee View (Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, 1961), 60-62; Ibid., 84; Ibid., 105.

Jefferson's pro-resistance invocations. Weyl devoted an entire chapter, entitled "Jefferson and the Natural Aristocracy," to analyzing Jefferson's views. According to the author, "Thomas Jefferson's attitude toward slavery and the Negro has been systematically misrepresented. He has been falsely depicted as an egalitarian, as a friend of the Negro and as a crusader against slavery." In great detail, Weyl attempted to refute the inclusion of blacks in "all men are created equal," by outlining Jefferson's authorship of the harsh 1779 Virginia Bill Concerning Slaves, and summarized his views on black inferiority in the Notes on the State of Virginia. In 1963, Weyl, along with Stefan T. Possony, wrote The Geography of Intellect, which sought to expound the scientific theories behind racial inequality.⁴⁵

The books by Brady, Talmadge, Putnam, and Weyl were by no means the only books published by segregationists that employed the Jefferson image, but they were the most significant. The Citizens Council sponsored these books and made them widely available through their local branches and national newspaper. This method of dissemination succeeded in spreading thousands of copies of these segregationist polemics throughout the South and the nation, all of which celebrated the presence of Jefferson on their "side."

The vicious and extremist racism that damaged the heroic image of Jefferson was evident at the most prominent expression of the Citizens Council's solidarity and power.

⁴⁵ Nathaniel Weyl, The Negro in American Civilization (Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, 1960), 35-51; Nathaniel Weyl and Stefan T. Possony, The Geography of Intellect (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1963), 8-9.

On February 11, 1956, just as Autherine Lucy began her first attempts to enter the University of Alabama, the Citizens Councils in Alabama called for a massive rally in the Montgomery Coliseum. Fifteen thousand supporters of segregation attended this impressive event, which featured keynote speaker Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland. It also offered the opportunity for the broad dissemination of segregationist propaganda and literature. One of the pamphlets handed out that night, "A Preview of the Declaration of Segregation," revealed the possible ends to which of the racial link between Jefferson and the segregationists might be taken:

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary to abolish the Negro race, proper methods should be used. Among these are guns, bows and arrows, slingshots and knives.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all whites are created equal with certain inalienable rights; among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of dead niggers.

Such images contrast sharply with the memorialized version of Jefferson. Ultimately, the mere fact that segregationists who supported statements such as these claimed Jefferson as their hero directly led to the destruction that was to come to the heroic symbol of Jefferson.⁴⁶

According to historian Benjamin Muse, "the Southern challenge to federal authority in the 1950s was graver than any [crisis] that had arisen since the Civil War..." Although all denunciations of the Supreme Court, constitutional doctrines that called for the "interposition" of state sovereignty, and racial warnings of the dangers of integration were not enough to stave off the eventual implementation of the Brown ruling, in the late

⁴⁶ Quoted in Martin, 39; also in James Peck, Freedom Ride (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 55.

1950s the issue was still seriously in doubt. For the segregationists, Thomas Jefferson's image and symbolic baggage was at the core of this defense of Jim Crow. The simple mention of his name evoked authority and respectability; and the fact that Southern extremists would be able to invoke his words on the three issues of interposition, judicial tyranny, and race made him a vital and frequently mentioned figure. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1960s, extremists saturated the South with propaganda, "educational materials," speeches and newspaper articles that repeatedly delineated the segregationist links with Jefferson. At the same time, black civil rights leaders began to amplify similar allegations that emphasized Jefferson's deep-seated racism, in effect agreeing with the Southern whites' interpretation. Although they would employ arguments that differed in meaning from the segregationists, 1960s civil rights activists accepted and expanded the discussion of Jefferson's racial views.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Muse, Ten Years of Prelude, 160.

No Ransom Offered By Blacks

Black leaders of the burgeoning civil rights movement did not disagree with Southern extremists that the author of the Declaration of Independence was a racist. Instead, they simply reversed the segregationist argument giving it a negative connotation. Unlike the white resisters, integrationists did not view Jefferson as an essential figure for them to “capture” for their side. For the most part, black activists in the 1960s saw Jefferson as an irrelevant, dead, white slaveholder. Civil rights leaders who, ironically, were finally attempting to give meaning to the sacred preamble of the Declaration, would offer no ransom for the segregationists’ capture of Thomas Jefferson.

Two of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s most famous statements, the “I Have a Dream” speech and the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” include references to, and invocations of, Jefferson’s symbolic authority. These documents, however, stand alone: most civil rights leaders did not call upon the heroic Jefferson image. For most blacks in the early 1960s who participated in sit-ins, voter registration drives, and active protest movements, Thomas Jefferson was not helpful to the cause. According to followers of the new techniques of direct action, reliance upon heroic figures and intellectual searches through the American past had not worked in previous movements, and they were not pursued in the 1960s. Civil rights historian Aldon Morris agreed, arguing that the embrace of the

non-violent, aggressive method of protest, such as those first efforts in Baton Rouge and Montgomery, did succeed in bringing significant changes whereas past legal or educational approaches had not achieved any degree of social and political equality.⁴⁸

This interpretation grew even more complex in the later years of the movement as organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) drifted further to the left and cries of “Black Power” emerged. Black leaders who had initially dismissed Jefferson as irrelevant now denounced him as a racist slaveholder. A 1968 editorial in the NAACP’s magazine The Crisis voiced concern about a similarly new interpretation of another central historical figure, Abraham Lincoln. “It is ironic that some of the apostles of the new cult of black “militancy” should now be adopting the view of the white bigots who maintain that Abraham Lincoln was essentially a racist espousing the evil doctrine of white supremacy,” the journal commented. It was the same for Jefferson: black extremists emphasized his slave ownership and reopened discussion of the dormant Sally Hemings affair. By the late 1960s, the memorialized Jefferson image was under assault from both the right and the left.⁴⁹

The image of Thomas Jefferson as the heroic Founding Father would not be abandoned by all in the late 1950s and 1960s; some veteran civil rights activists still looked toward the postwar interpretation of the Sage of Monticello with sympathetic

⁴⁸ Aldon D. Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organization for Change (New York: Free Press, 1984), xi.

⁴⁹ The Crisis 75 (February 1968): 42-43.

eyes. Those who had come of age during the New Deal and World War II, such as NAACP leaders Walter White and Roy Wilkins, embraced the libertarian version of Jefferson and his sacred document. Wilkins, who was White's successor and NAACP president throughout the civil rights movement, reaffirmed his faith in America in his autobiography. Claiming to speak for his entire race, he asserted that "we have believed that the Declaration of Independence meant what it said. All of my life I have believed in these things, and I will die believing them." Prominent Howard University professor Rayford W. Logan, whose 1944 What the Negro Wants became a highly influential work for leaders of the future civil rights movement, proclaimed in the late 60s that, regardless of what "the original signers may have thought, the Declaration's ringing assertion about men's equality and 'unalienable' rights has been a constant challenge to the American people. The oppressed of all nations have drawn inspiration from it." In a 1958 Journal of Negro History article, Dwight Dumond also stood solidly behind the traditional heroic symbol of Jefferson and the Declaration:

The United States of America came into being with the Declaration of Independence, and for nearly two centuries the people have carried closer to their hearts than any other treasure the testament of faith therein contained. One has only to mention the name of Jefferson, or to speak of the Declaration to strike chords, not of remembrance, but of promise. The Declaration *was* a proclamation; it *has become* a revelation.

But perhaps the most effective invocation of Jefferson's sacred image came from the charismatic core of the movement, Martin Luther King, Jr.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Roy Wilkins, Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 343; Rayford W. Logan and Irving S. Cohen, The American Negro: Old World Background and New World Experience (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 56; Dwight Dumond, "The Fourteenth Amendment Trilogy in Historical Perspective," Journal of Negro History 43 (July 1958): 173.

In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," King approvingly described Jefferson as an "extremist." Along with other Biblical and historical "extremists," King depicted Jefferson as one who transcended his age and societal boundaries by "etching across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence." According to historian Keith Miller, King "invoked sacred time [and] he compared himself to ... Jesus, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Lincoln and Jefferson as though they shared his cell block in Birmingham." Jefferson's image in "Birmingham Jail" was that of a visionary egalitarian who thought far ahead of his time. This is the traditional heroic version of Jefferson symbolically immortalized at the shore of the Tidal Basin.⁵¹

In a second and even more powerful instance, King would again invoke the sacred Jefferson, only this time in an anonymous, universal sense. The most visual and prominent event of the civil rights movement occurred with the August 28, 1963 March on Washington, which culminated in King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Although the event's speakers stood in the shadow of the Great Emancipator, Jefferson was also in attendance, called on in universal terms by Martin Luther King, Jr. King's powerful words that day are now part of America's cultural vocabulary:

So we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. 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 the

⁵¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't Wait (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 77-101; In a 1958 article for New South King used the same arguments and examples as in the Birmingham Jail letter - Jesus, Amos, Lincoln and Jefferson - only he used the word "maladjusted" instead of "extremist." Martin Luther King, "The Current Crisis in Race Relations," New South 13 (Winter 1958): 8-12; Keith D. Miller, Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King and Its Sources (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 166-167.

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.

In this emotional speech Jefferson lost his historical identity. King subsumed him into the sacred imagery of the Declaration of Independence, referring to him simply to as an “architect of our republic. Through anonymously invoking Jefferson’s immortal document, King was able to criticize emotionally the nation’s past and present for failing to live out “the true meaning of its creed,” which he later defined as “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” King also managed to capture Jefferson’s mystical libertarian creed without having to deal with any of the racial baggage that accompanied his image, by using what historians Keith Miller and Emily Lewis described as “the ‘god-term’ of freedom,” an appeal to Jefferson’s immortal preamble. The context in which King invoked the legendary image of the author of “all men are created equal,” however, was not a dream. According to one historian, “the first half of ‘I Have a Dream’ did not celebrate a dream. It catalogued a nightmare [and] ... argued that the finest secular presences, including Jefferson and Lincoln, had failed miserably.” Thus the imagery of bounced checks and insufficient funds: the treasury of American equality, founded by Jefferson’s preamble, had never been stocked. King’s timeless speech, because of its piercing commentary on America’s deepest social problem, connected Jefferson, in universal and sacred terms, to a flawed vision and to failed actions in the past.⁵²

⁵² King, *A Testament of Hope*, 217, *Ibid.*, 219; Keith D. Miller and Emily M. Lewis, “Touchstones, Authorities and Marian Anderson: The Making of ‘I Have a Dream’,” *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* Brian Ward and Tony Badger, eds. (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), 158; Miller, 145.

Unlike the celebratory use of Jefferson in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," the nameless inclusion of Jefferson in the "Dream" speech evoked emotions of both hope and despair. Many other egalitarian writers would view Jefferson in similarly ambivalent fashion, emphasizing his inability to free himself from the institution of slavery. It was Jefferson's life-long position as a great slaveholder that made him a problematic figure for the integrationists to employ as authority in their crusade for equality. Those who still embraced the traditional version of Jefferson carefully characterized him as a well-meaning white man caught on the horns of a great dilemma.

In a break with King's portrayal in the "Birmingham Jail" letter, several pro-black writers began to show Jefferson as a product of his historical time and place. They depicted Jefferson as confined by his age in which he lived, which in turn restricted him from freely acting upon his true feelings toward emancipation and human equality. This view was governed by a cautious suspicion, for in this manner Jefferson is shown as sadly unable to transcend his societal boundaries, rid himself of slavery, and give meaning to the libertarian creed with which he is forever identified.

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In his 1962 book Before the Mayflower, Ebony magazine senior editor Lerone Bennett eloquently summarized how some blacks viewed Jefferson's tragic dilemma:

All his life he had wrestled with the awful presence of his slaves and the noble sound of his words and he had gone down in defeat. He was not a small man and so his defeat gives no man joy. In him was the strength and the weakness of America. He died on July 4, 1826, and went to his grave, borne by weeping slaves.

For another sympathetic writer, Jefferson was a “classic example of [the nation’s] moral dilemma ... [between] its liberal democratic ideals, promises and pretensions, and the agonizing and persistent realities of the aspirations of the black experience.” A third commented that “Jefferson best illustrates the plight of the leader of intelligence and morality caught in the sticky web of political and social compromise.” Other African-American writers who still viewed Jefferson sympathetically cited his condemnation of slavery in his original draft of the Declaration as proof that Jefferson’s actual feelings about universal human equality were indeed trapped by the eighteenth century.⁵³

Louis Lomax, a professor of philosophy at Georgia State University, who also wrote for the Baltimore Afro-American, wrote The Negro Revolt in 1962. Lomax argued that Jefferson, whom he described as plagued by “gnawing doubt,” was “himself a slaveholder, was troubled by the ... paradox of liberty and slavery, and he made an attempt to include a section in the Declaration of Independence that would have condemned the King of England for allowing the slave trade.” This final clause, which Southern delegates had deleted due to its potential threat to their interests, afforded Jefferson the careful sympathy of the moderate civil rights leaders. Martin Luther King’s 1963 book Why We Can’t Wait, which, ironically, also contained the Birmingham Jail letter, showed that even he was not fully convinced of Jefferson’s ability to transcend his time and place. He admitted that “as splendid as are the words of the Declaration of

⁵³ Lerone Bennett, Jr., Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1962 (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1962), 128, emphasis in original text; Samuel Dubois Cook, introduction to The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Hanes Walton, Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), xviii; David Loye, The Healing of a Nation (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 42.

Independence, there are disquieting implications in the fact that the original phrasing was altered to delete a condemnation of the British monarch for his espousal of slavery.” Again, as with the “I Have a Dream” speech, King subsumed the historical Jefferson into the overall symbolism of the Declaration. Unlike the Southern segregationists, egalitarian rhetoricians and authors employed the image of Jefferson strictly because of the Declaration; without that mythical document, Jefferson was utterly useless. But to a growing number of integrationists throughout the mid to late 1960s, he became obsolete even as the author of “all men are created equal.”⁵⁴

African-American historian John Hope Franklin, in his enormously popular From Slavery to Freedom, explained this increasing disillusionment. According to Franklin, “even if Jefferson did say that ‘all men are created equal,’ it could not be forgotten that the antislavery passages of the Declaration were ruled out altogether.... The implications of the Declaration, however vague, were so powerful that Southern slaveowners found it desirable to deny the self-evident truths that it expounded.” Franklin saw Jefferson firmly on the fence about the slavery issue, despite his famous writings that supported

⁵⁴ Louis Lomax, The Negro Revolt (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 11; *Ibid.*; The stricken clause, the last in Jefferson’s indictments of the King reads: “He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation hither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of INFIDEL powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the LIBERTIES of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the LIVES of another.” The Portable Thomas Jefferson Merrill D. Peterson, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), 238-239; Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can’t Wait (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 143.

emancipation. In a series of lectures given for the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1976, Franklin argued that “although Jefferson insisted he was strongly anti-slavery, his antipathy toward the institution never took him to the point of freeing his own slaves or of using his enormous prestige to oppose slavery unequivocally in word or deed.” Franklin further asserted that “his status as a large slaveholder ... blurred the distinction between him and his fellow slaveholders.” It was this status, as the holder of over 200 bondsmen, which consistently appeared in the writings of egalitarian writers, and reflected the rising number of 1960s criticisms of the traditional interpretations of early American history, of the Founding Fathers, and of the author of the Declaration of Independence.⁵⁵

Spurred on partly by the severe white reaction to desegregation, this growing disillusionment manifested itself in several changes in the ways that blacks interpreted the image of Jefferson. The first shift involved the revitalization of the story that, according to one historian, “had been dragged like a dead cat [behind Jefferson] through the pages of formal and informal history.” The charge James T. Callender leveled at Jefferson in 1802 – that he had a long-term sexual relationship and several children with one of his slaves – reappeared as if from exile in the late 1950s and grew in the years that followed. Another shift was the emphasis placed on Jefferson’s role as a slaveholder and his belief in the inferiority of slaves, as expounded in his Notes on the State of Virginia.

⁵⁵ John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans 3rd edition (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), 89; The NEH lectures were gathered into a book: John Hope Franklin, Racial Equality in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 15-16.

In later years, more militant, radical blacks who looked to amplify the crimes of America's past would seize on and deepen these narratives. The degree to which these revisions would ultimately penetrate the traditional interpretation of Jefferson is apparent in a 1968 textbook aimed at young black readers, Chronicles of Negro Protest: A Background Book for Young People Documenting the History of Black Power.

Jefferson's deleted Declaration indictment is reprinted in full, but in an introductory paragraph the authors reveal the late 60s alterations: "It is sometimes noted that Jefferson himself was a plantation owner and a slaveholder, and that in his book Notes on the State of Virginia he questioned the black man's inherent capabilities."⁵⁶

The first of these revisions would have a substantial impact on how Americans would view Thomas Jefferson for decades after the civil rights movement ended. In November 1954, the story of Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings again appeared with the publication of an article in Ebony magazine entitled "Thomas Jefferson's Negro Grandchildren." Complete with pictures of the "handful of elderly Negroes who can trace their ancestry to the most illustrious of America's Founding Fathers," the short article reopened the narrative that had been quiet for several decades. The anonymous author declared that "many reputable historians concede that Jefferson fathered at least five Negro children." By doing so, the writer sounded the first volley in a fierce intellectual debate that would capture the attention of both the historical profession and

⁵⁶ Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 465; Chronicles of Negro Protest: A Background Book For Young People Documenting the History of Black Power Bradford Chamber, ed. (New York: Parents' Magazine Press, 1968), 54-58.

the general public in the 1970s. Also in 1954, Phylon, a journal dedicated to African-American issues, published an article by W. Edward Farrison that analyzed the origins of William Wells Brown's 1848 poem Clotel; or the President's Daughter. Brown's poem, according to Farrison, examined "the incongruity between America's democratic ideals and its cherished institution of chattel slavery." The context out of which Brown develops this theme of American paradox is the alleged story of the selling of one of Jefferson's slave daughters, which Farrison argued, "illustrate[d] the ironical inconsistencies that existed between the theories and the practices of *soi*-distant democratic American slave-holders, of whom the famous author of the Declaration of Independence [was] ... an archetype." The Phylon article also served to reopen discussion of the Sally Hemings story.⁵⁷

Another important African-American journal published the third in the series of new Sally Hemings articles. Pearl M. Graham's "Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings" appeared in the spring 1961 issue of the Journal of Negro History. Graham's unbalanced article eviscerated Jefferson at times, and at others apologized for his actions. She argued that "translated into terms of today's racial problems, Jefferson would sanction South African apartheid ... and, reluctantly no doubt, he would decree that the black must be the race to be exterminated." Graham concluded that "in theory, he was not so far from Hitler, with his concept of a Master Race," but then absolved Jefferson by admitting that "he sacrificed much for his country; and he did her great service. And for these things,

⁵⁷ "Thomas Jefferson's Negro Grandchildren," Ebony 10 (November 1954): 78-80, quote on 78; W. Edward Farrison, "The Origins of Brown's *Clotel*," Phylon 15 (December 1954): 347; *Ibid.*, 354.

his country – and I think, his descendants – have long forgiven him for the evil that he did.” These descriptions of Jefferson, as another Hitler and as a supporter of apartheid, flew directly in the face of the heroic image captured in the Tidal Basin memorial. These articles also opened up the Jefferson image to racial criticism, and, coupled with a growing radicalism and emphasis on “Black Power” throughout the civil rights movement, led to the repudiation of the heroic Jefferson by the late 1960s.⁵⁸

The growing radicalism that marked the later years of the civil rights movement, led by the militancy of Malcolm X and new leadership in established organizations such as CORE and SNCC, brought to the forefront Stokely Carmichael, James Farmer, and Julian Bond. The Black Panther Party, which started principally in California and spread throughout the nation in the late 60s, also emphasized black independence. These shifts in the civil rights movement led to an alteration in the way blacks viewed American history. The increasing emphasis on “Black Power” led to a search into the past for African-American heroes. Narratives sparked by this revision therefore accentuated Jefferson’s interactions with blacks; they primarily emphasized his status as a slaveholder, his failures in defending universal human rights, his published views on the evils of miscegenation, and the paradox created by his relationship with Sally Hemings.

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The primary thrust of the exponents of “Black Power” was African-American centered, in social situations, in political circles, and in looking at the past. Black

⁵⁸ Pearl M. Graham, “Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings,” Journal of Negro History 46 (April 1961): 103.

nationalists decried American history books that did not mention or discuss African-Americans, and lobbied for balance and parity. CORE President James Farmer asserted in 1965 that the civil rights movement had sparked the renewed investigation of black history. "In the movement for equal rights we discovered a history: Had not the slaves rebelled tirelessly against their lot as we now rebelled? Suddenly we found heroes and examples from our own past: Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Harriet Tubman ... in the movement we found an identity." Activist Julian Bond also commented that "our history in [American politics] is not a long one, but it has some glorious chapters." Arthur Smith's Rhetoric of Black Revolution expressed the notion that blacks were motivated to seek their own past because they were "bombarded by Shakespeare, Milton, Emerson and Poe, the blacks now believed that they also needed Phyllis Wheatley, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Countee Cullen – Americans of African descent." This emphasis on seeking out a black past that grew throughout the 1960s left no room for traditional white heroes, especially Jefferson. An article titled "Nat Turner is 'In'" appeared in the September 8, 1967 Charleston News and Courier, confirming the trend: "Though the name of Nat Turner has not been familiar to many Americans in recent years, his memory is being revived in this period of U.S. history." Conversely, as black historians analyzed and amplified the deeds of African-Americans, the villains of American history quickly became the white slaveholders. Black Panther Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver's book Soul on Ice plainly declared in 1968 that "the white

race has lost its heroes. Worse, its heroes have been revealed as villains and its greatest heroes as the arch-villains.”⁵⁹

The first edition of Lerone Bennett’s The Shaping of Black America appeared in 1969. Bennett, a Northwestern University professor of history in the late 60s, entitled a chapter “The Black Founding Fathers” rhetorically asking who was responsible for the “ideology of rationalizations” that led to racism. Bennett’s answer echoed the Black Power perspective: “The white Founding Fathers, the Byrds, the Mathers, and Winthrops, the Jeffersons, the Washingtons, *the heroes of all the Fourths of July*. They divided blacks and whites, they sowed the seeds of division and hate and blood.” Bennett further argued that “the lived synthesis of the black Founding Fathers was different from the lived synthesis of the white Founding Fathers. Although that idea sounds radical and complicated, it is really quite simple. It means simply that Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Jefferson’s slaves lived quite a different Declaration of Independence, a different Revolution, and a different America.” Other writers shared this shifting view of black history and the growing hostility toward Thomas Jefferson that it reflected. Author Julius Lester, who served as a field secretary for SNCC in the late 60s, used vivid language to portray Jefferson and the Founding Fathers in his Look Out Whitey! Black Power’s Gon’ Get Your Mama! According to Lester, “blacks can see very clearly that America is a nation built upon inhumanity. The signers of the Declaration of Independence put down

⁵⁹ James Farmer, Freedom - When? (New York: Random House, 1965), 87; Julian Bond, A Time to Speak, A Time to Act: The Movement in Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 25; Charleston News and Courier, 8 September 1967; Arthur L. Smith, Rhetoric of Black Revolution (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1969), 13; Eldridge Cleaver, Soul On Ice (New York: Ramparts, 1968), 68.

their quills to go home and beat their slaves. Blacks have heard the noble words while the whip shredded the skins of their backs.”⁶⁰

Another powerful example of the hostile attitude blacks expressed toward the memorialized version of Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers came from the prominent leader of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X. In a speech given just a few weeks before he died, Malcolm X discussed his view of the so-called white heroes in America’s past. According to him,

they were crooks that came here – Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Quincy, and the others, all of them were criminals. And if you doubt that they were, when they wrote this document talking about freedom, they still owned you. Yes, when they wrote, how does that thing go – about “all men created equal”? ... Who was it wrote that, “all men created equal”? It was Jefferson. Jefferson had more slaves than anybody else. So they weren’t talking about us.

When I see some poor old brainwashed Negroes – you mention Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and Patrick Henry, they just swoon, you know, with patriotism. But they don’t realize that in the sight of George Washington, you were a ... sack of potatoes, a barrel of molasses, you amounted to nothing in the sight of Washington or in the sight of Jefferson ... You were their property. And if it was left up to them, you’d still be their property today.

Images such as these stand in sharp contrast to the images Rayford Logan and Roy

Wilkins employed to invoke the symbol of Thomas Jefferson. Even Martin Luther King had altered his version of Jefferson by the late 1960s. King’s last book, Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community described Jefferson in terms that did not match those he had spoken on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial just three years earlier.

⁶⁰ Lerone Bennett, Jr., The Shaping of Black America. (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1969), 69, emphasis in original text; Ibid., 114-115; Julius Lester, Look Out Whitey! Black Powers Gon’ Get Your Mama! (New York: The Dial Press, 1968), xii.

According to King, "Jefferson's majestic words, 'all men are created equal' meant for him, as for many others, that all *white* men are created equal."⁶¹

The arguments of these militant followers of Black Power were based on the same premises as those of their segregationist enemies in the South. A poignant illustration of this similarity came in two articles focusing on the racism of Abraham Lincoln in the Citizens Council magazine, The Citizen, and Ebony. Because of his powerful symbolism as the Great Emancipator, Lincoln's importance in the pitched battle between blacks and whites exceeded that of even Jefferson. Lincoln's racial views appeared alongside Jefferson's in segregationist editorials and speeches with similar frequency. In February 1964, The Citizen dedicated an entire issue to the "real" racial views of Lincoln. Four years later Ebony magazine ran an article entitled "Was Abe Lincoln A White Supremacist?" The conclusions reached by both magazines were startling. The opening salvo in The Citizen proclaimed, "Abraham Lincoln was an avowed white supremacist! But his name and memory have been kidnapped by dishonest integrationists in a brazen historical theft, hoping thus to use the 'Great Emancipator's' prestige for their own devious ends." In 1968 Ebony responded:

Abraham Lincoln was *not* the Great Emancipator....[instead] there is abundant evidence to indicate that the Emancipation Proclamation was not what people think it is and that Lincoln issued it with extreme misgivings and reservations. Even more decisive is the fact that Lincoln was a tragically flawed figure who shared the racial prejudices of most of his white contemporaries.

⁶¹ Malcolm X, On Afro-American History (New York: Pathfinder, 1967), 39-40; Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 76.

The articles were directed at representing groups with vastly different goals, but employed similar arguments. The segregationist editors of The Citizen considered Lincoln's racial views in a positive light, ending the special issue with the announcement that "if he lived today, his position would be regarded not merely as that of a segregationist, but of an out-and-out white supremacist!" Ebony, conversely, pointed out the Great Emancipator's "warts and excrescences," but characterized Lincoln as "tragically flawed" rather than vicious. However, these two contentions, which appeared in the most prominent sources of integrationist and segregationist rhetoric, both assailed Lincoln on the issue of race.⁶²

Whether closed-minded whites praised Lincoln as a white supremacist or black militants denounced him for the same reasons, the overall impression that emerges is that Lincoln was a racist. Both groups applied these very arguments to the image of Jefferson as well. As the civil rights movement matured over the course of fifteen years, the ways in which blacks viewed and invoked the Jefferson image also shifted. Acceptance, represented by the outright praise of older leaders and Martin Luther King, became explanation – Jefferson as if trapped by the cultural and moral boundaries of the age in which he lived – and finally, as the movement radicalized in the late 60s, outright criticism of Jefferson as a racist slaveholder. By the end of the 1960s, the traditional image of Jefferson was under attack from both the right and the left.

⁶² The Citizen 8 (February 1964): 2; Lerone Bennett, "Was Abraham Lincoln a White Supremacist?" Ebony 23 (February 1968), 35; The Citizen, 8 (February 1964): 14; Ebony, 23 (February 1968): 42.

Police Methods Prove Ineffective

How the group that had traditionally “policed” the Jefferson image in the past – liberal politicians and Jefferson scholars – reacted to the 1960s debate would prove to be crucial. For several reasons, their efforts did not amount to an effective defense against the revisions that questioned the memorialized version of Jefferson. For the most part, those who had the ammunition and the opportunity to defend Jefferson the best chose not to do so, possibly because they saw segregationists’ attempt to “capture” Jefferson as futile. Furthermore, segregationist groups, most notably the Citizens Councils, created an environment of strict conformity and enforced social pressures on Southern liberals who disagreed with “massive resistance.” The choice to keep silent was in some cases a matter of personal safety because, as Neil McMillen argued, “the right of free expression was the one of the earliest casualties in the war to defend segregation.”⁶³

In his 1982 Ph.D. dissertation, “Without Urgency or Ardor: The South’s Middle-of-the-Road Liberals and Civil Rights, 1945-1960,” Anthony Newberry agreed that the amount of power wielded by anti-Brown groups was tremendous. “From the segregationist perspective, the South was under siege, the Southern way of life threatened. Defenders of the regional faith could brook no slackers, no fifth columns of

⁶³ McMillen, 235.

neutralists, doubters and critics, no 'do-gooders' and 'nigger-lovers.'" Southern moderates who approved of the Supreme Court ruling had to be extremely careful in how they expressed that support. In the "quest for conformity," as Numan Bartley labeled the racial orthodoxy of Southern extremists, most moderates feared social, economic and personal reprisals, and remained quiet. Blacks faced even harsher retaliation. Aldon D. Morris asserts that the segregationist and Citizens Council campaign in the late 1950s nearly ended NAACP activity in the South, which in turn opened the door for new civil rights organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to gain an important foothold in the black community.⁶⁴

Still, criticism of the segregationists' use of the Jefferson image did surface in the South. Buoyed by the strength of the Southern Regional Council and its journal New South, some Southern moderates did find a safe outlet for their criticism. In 1956 Irving Brant and Arthur S. Miller published articles in New South attacking interposition, and Southern Regional Council leader Ralph McGill campaigned for compliance with Brown from his bully pulpit as the editor of the Atlanta Constitution. At the height of the segregation battle in the South, Southern Regional Council president James McBride Dabbs published The Southern Heritage. Dabbs tapped into the heroic image of Jefferson by asserting that "those who doubt the existence of a democratic tradition in the South should remember that the South produced Jefferson." He discussed the anti-slavery clause in the Declaration and continued his glowing portrayal of Jefferson by explaining

⁶⁴ Anthony Lake Newberry, "Without Urgency or Ardor: The South's Middle-of-the-Road Liberals and Civil Rights, 1945-1960," (Ph.D. diss., Ohio University, 1982), 356; Bartley, 190; Morris, 26-35.

that: "Though Jefferson never freed his own slaves, partly on the ground that he had no right to turn them loose in a society which had no provision for them, partly because of bankruptcy, he was deeply concerned about the injustice of slavery and troubled for his country when he reflected that God is just."⁶⁵

In 1962, a collection of essays by Southern moderates entitled We Dissent examined the segregation issue. Former Virginia gubernatorial candidate and Rhodes scholar Francis Pickens Miller's submission, "Dawn in the South," argued that the failure of Virginia abolitionists in the 1832 slave debates marked the day "the forces of liberalism as personified by the spirit of Thomas Jefferson [began their] full retreat." According to Miller, the "spirit of Monticello," repudiated by Virginia since that time, "represents the spirit that faces forward rather than backward, that is impelled by curiosity to explore the unknown ... [and] that regards every man, regardless of his race or social status, as entitled to equality of opportunity with every other man." Miller asserted that by confronting the Brown decision, Virginians can "confront the reality of the modern world for the first time," and therefore return to the path that Jefferson's spirit embodied. Miller, like Dabbs and many other Southern liberals, defended the heroic Jefferson image by using traditional symbolism as his evidence.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Irving Brant, "Madison and Interposition," New South 11 (February 1956): 6-8; Arthur S. Miller, "The Interposition Gambit," New South 11 (June 1956): 4-6; James McBride Dabbs, The Southern Heritage (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1958), 224; *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁶⁶ Francis Pickens Miller, "Dawn in the South," We Dissent Hoke Norris, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), 117-118;

The Louisville, Kentucky Southern Newsletter, "a monthly magazine written by liberal Southerners for their fellow Southerners," whose purpose was "to serve as a source of information and as a bond between forward looking folks in Dixie," also allowed Southern moderates to speak out against the segregationist majority. The March 1960 issue was entirely devoted to informing its readers "about those enlightened and democratic Southerners who wanted and worked for a Southland with equal justice for all, industry, schools, union, and a square deal for farmers." The traditional, memorialized Jefferson was at the heart of the issue. Described as "perhaps the greatest democrat our country has produced," the Southern Newsletter editors invoked all the traditional arguments for Jefferson's heroic image, including a large hand-drawn portrait whose caption read "He opposed slavery ... sponsored education ... loved human liberty." The article even took on the segregationists' assertions that Jefferson viewed blacks as inferior by declaring that "Thomas Jefferson went much farther in recognizing the abilities of the Negro people than most of his contemporaries."⁶⁷

What is striking is that northern writers, free from the societal pressure groups of their counterparts in the South, did not respond to the criticisms levied against the traditional image of Thomas Jefferson. A few liberal fixtures, such as The Progressive, Time, and the New York Times did make cursory efforts to hypothesize about what Jefferson's opinions on the desegregation issue would be, but other prominent sources remained silent. This was due, in part, to the effectiveness of African-American criticism

⁶⁷ "The Other South," Southern Newsletter 5 (March/April 1960): 4-6.

and to the growing number of calls to investigate and revise the exclusionary nature of the memorialized Jefferson image. Most newspapers and magazines in the North concentrated on vilifying the segregationists and their attempts to halt the integration order.

One element of the heroic Jefferson image the New York Times and Time magazine seized upon was Thomas Jefferson's role as Virginia's first advocate of public education, and his legendary status as "the father of the University of Virginia." One editorial in The New York Times lamented the children of Prince Edward County's loss of educational opportunities because of the county's four-year refusal to open a desegregated school. Entitled "The Children of Virginia," the editorial looked to the plight of those disadvantaged children and rhetorically asked if "a child [is] more or less worthy of education in proportion to the pigmentation of its skin?" The editor's response recalled the image of Jefferson the educator: "We know what one eminent Virginian, Thomas Jefferson, would now say if he could be asked these questions." This echoed an editorial that had appeared earlier in the Prince Edward County controversy. In "If Jefferson Could Return," the Times wondered "what one famous Virginian, who devoted the odd moments of half a busy century to planning educational systems, would say of this development." When Prince Edward County finally did open its schoolhouse doors in 1963, the Times shook its head at Virginia, calling the episode "a sad page in the

history of the Old Dominion, a leader of the Revolution of 1776, the Mother of Presidents.”⁶⁸

A third article that invoked Jefferson’s role as a pioneer in American education appeared in the September 22, 1958 issue of Time. The cover article, “The Gravest Crisis,” centered on Virginia Governor Lindsey Almond and the beginning of the school closing controversy in which the Prince Edward County school system was a casualty. On the issue’s first page, in the table of contents, appeared a picture of Houdon’s bust of Jefferson and a short paragraph that summarized the article:

Thomas Jefferson, the 2nd [sic] governor of Virginia, who ranked the education of the common people ‘above all things’, proposed the nation’s first public-school system in 1779. Last week James Lindsay Almond, 66th in the line of Virginia’s Governors, who ranks segregation of the races above all things, was ready to preside over the dissolution of the school system which Jefferson established.

Time further linked Jefferson to the present-day school crisis by opening the article with a quotation from one of Jefferson’s 1787 letters to James Madison. The magazine’s editors attempted to recruit a revered Founding Father to repudiate the actions of the segregationist governor, whom they scolded for “declining to step into the shoes of such Virginians as Washington, Jefferson, [and] Madison ... at a time when the nation needs the type of enlightened leadership that is due from Virginia.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ New York Times, 28 August 1961; New York Times, 19 February 1959; New York Times, 15 August 1963.

⁶⁹ “The Gravest Crisis,” Time, 22 September 1958, 15-18. The quotation from Jefferson to Madison reads “Above all things, I hope the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on their good senses we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty.” TJ to Madison, 20 December 1787, Ford, vol. 5, 374-375; *Ibid.*, 18.

Possibly the most vivid visual examples of a pro-Brown recruitment of the memorialized, heroic version of Jefferson came from two political cartoons. In the April 28, 1956 Norfolk Journal and Guide a cartoon appeared entitled "Democracy Long Overdue." In the foreground appeared a black man, who was literally labeled "The Negro," lying prone under the force of a huge white fist marked "unequal rights for 357 years." To the left of the oppressive fist was a portrait of Jefferson looking on, underlined by one of his statements on the protection of minorities and equal rights. The Journal and Guide, under the editorship of moderate Lenoir Chambers, pulled no punches in its imagery and recruitment of Jefferson (see Appendix, figure 3). A second political cartoon celebrating the passage of the Civil Rights Law of 1964 ran in the Louisville Courier-Journal on July 4, 1964. The cartoon consisted of a small black boy sitting with a copy of the law in his lap while he is grasped comfortingly by the shoulders by Thomas Jefferson, who was shown as emerging into the scene through the text of the Declaration of Independence. The caption completed the sacred symbolism: "...That All Men Are Created Equal..." It was imagery that would make even the designers of the Jefferson Memorial envious (see Appendix, figure 4).⁷⁰

However, when compared with the volume of material the segregationists published and disseminated to recruit the Jefferson image for their side, these paltry

⁷⁰ Norfolk Journal and Guide, 28 April 1956, the full quotation reads "All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable that the minority possess their **EQUAL RIGHTS** which **EQUAL LAW** must protect and to violate would be oppression." The emphasis was added by the cartoonist. Louisville Courier-Journal, 4 July 1964.

efforts at evoking emotional images of Jefferson by Northern presses and Southern moderates paled.

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Another critical element that the segregationists' capture and the African-Americans' attacks would have on Jefferson's image was the reaction of those historians who saw themselves as the trustees of Thomas Jefferson's legacy and reputation. Writing history and biography about Thomas Jefferson blossomed into a cottage industry after World War II. Rejuvenated by the postwar surge that celebrated Jefferson's libertarian democracy, popular writers and historians alike focused in on the historical Jefferson. According to one historian, with the ascendancy of the New Deal "partisan polemics paled, [and] the day of historical scholarship, represented by Julian Boyd and Dumas Malone, dawned. The 'quest for the historical Jefferson' could commence." Dumas Malone, after leaving his seven-year stint as editor of the Dictionary of American Biography, earnestly began what he planned as a four-volume biography of Jefferson in 1948. In the same year, eminent historian Daniel Boorstin published The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson. John Dos Passos, author of The 42nd Parallel and The Big Money, started researching The Head and the Heart of Thomas Jefferson in the early 1950s. In 1950, Adrienne Koch's important book Jefferson and Madison: The Great Collaboration followed her 1943 publication The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson. By 1954 new books chronicling Jefferson's life and times saturated bookstores and libraries. Written by the

pre-World War II generation of scholars who were fueled by the postwar Apostle of Liberty surge, these books reinforced and amplified the heroic image of Jefferson.⁷¹

By 1960, a collection of Jefferson scholars, labeled "Jefferson's camp" by one historian, had begun to form, naturally, in Charlottesville, Virginia. The core of this group consisted, first, of Dumas Malone, who had come to the University of Virginia from Columbia in 1959 and was hard at work researching his long-awaited third volume of Jefferson and His Time. Merrill D. Peterson joined Malone in 1962, fresh from the publication of his Bancroft Prize-winning The Jefferson Image in the American Mind. These two scholars studied and wrote about Jefferson together for two decades.

Surrounding this core of Jefferson scholars were Julian Parks Boyd, eminent chief of mammoth project at Princeton University to produce a definitive edition of the papers of Jefferson; Richmond Times-Dispatch editor and author Virginius Dabney; and biography expert and fellow University of Virginia colleague Bernard Mayo.⁷²

In the first of what would turn out to be thousands of pages, Malone revealed the context that shaped the Mississippi scholar's vision of his subject: "Jefferson's reputation has grown enormously since [the nineteenth century], especially in the years since the First World War. In the very recent past, when totalitarianism threatened to engulf the

⁷¹ Edward Dumbauld, review of The Jefferson Image in the American Mind, by Merrill D. Peterson, In American Historical Review 66 (January 1961): 468; Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1948); John Dos Passos, The Head and Heart of Thomas Jefferson (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1954); Adrienne Koch, Jefferson and Madison: The Great Collaboration (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950); Adrienne Koch, The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943).

⁷² Eric McKittrick, "The View from Jefferson's Camp," New York Review of Books, 17 December 1970, 38.

world, men's minds inevitably turned back to this foe of every kind of tyranny." The world-view of this early twentieth century generation would be echoed twenty-two years later when Merrill Peterson wrote in Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation, that "each American generation has had its own perspective on the founding and the founders. In the case of my generation, which came of age in the Second World War and has witnessed shattering global upheaval for a quarter-century the experience throws into sharp relief the nation's beginning in another age of revolution." These statements celebrated Jefferson's mythical place in the ascendancy of American democracy to world power that Malone and Peterson's generation brought about. All these scholars can be seen together as a historical cohort: Malone, the elder statesman, was born in 1892; Dabney, Mayo, and Boyd, were born in 1901, 1902, and 1903, respectively; and Peterson, by far the youngest, was born in 1921. This common frame of reference and climate of opinion would shape the ways in which they viewed their subject and how, in their later years, they would react to the criticism that exploded in the late 1960s and 1970s. The writings of Malone, Peterson, Boyd, and the other members of "Jefferson's Camp" reflected the assumptions they shared, just as those in the 1960s generation who looked at Jefferson from a different perspective revealed the changes in viewpoint that defined the successive group of scholars.⁷³

⁷³ Dumas Malone, Jefferson the Virginian, vol. 1, Jefferson and His Time (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948), viii; Merrill D. Peterson, Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), ix.

These Jefferson historians shared another common denominator as well: most had chosen to take up the charge of interpreting and analyzing the Sage of Monticello in the very shadow of that famous mansion. Malone, Peterson, and Mayo were attached to the history department at Mr. Jefferson's University, while Dabney, only a few miles away in Richmond, had received both a bachelor's and master's degree from it. Another defender of the "faith" was Douglass Adair, whose position in Williamsburg with the Institute of Early American History and Culture also exposed him to Jefferson's influence. The only scholar who escaped the milieu of Charlottesville, because of the Princeton headquarters of the editorial project, was Julian Boyd. These considerations of age and background shaped the ways in which these historians analyzed Jefferson, and their reaction to the struggle over the implementation of Brown that was going on all around them.

Their reaction is vital because they simply did not respond to the changes Southern extremists and black militants were making to the traditional Jefferson image. The more than thirty studies that this group of historians wrote about Jefferson between 1954 and 1968 suggest that they shared Peterson's view that Jefferson had been forever retired to Monticello. Malone's activities, in the midst of his continuing research for Jefferson and His Time, ranged from preparing a radio program in 1954 on Jefferson's legacies, to writing two small pieces in the New York Times Magazine on Jefferson's home life at Monticello, and answering the question of whether George Washington was the greatest American ever. In the Virginia Quarterly Review, however, Malone did

attempt to address some current issues. In "The Relevance of Mr. Jefferson," Malone discussed the confusion that abounds when "a historical personage is quoted on opposite sides in a contemporary controversy, as Mr. Jefferson repeatedly has been." The issues on which Malone focused, however, did not primarily concern the contest over segregation in the South. Malone discussed the functions of government that Jefferson could not have foreseen due to "the processes of consolidation in all departments of life [that] have been greatly accelerated in our time by the series of wars and crises we have gone through." In language that revealed his World War II anti-totalitarian frame of reference, Malone discussed the preamble of Jefferson's Declaration as the "historic pronouncement of our national faith" that has "gone ringing down through the generations." For the older Malone, who was a veteran of World War I, these "were still-vibrant words when we answered the mad ravings of Adolf Hitler and countered the arrogant cruelty of the German Nazis." He did extend his analysis of the Declaration's implications in assertions that could be applied to the situation in the South: "Many people, many high-minded people find it hard to extend that faith [in human beings] to groups they have long regarded as 'lesser breeds without the law'; it is difficult indeed to uphold the freedom and dignity of all men when so many are unworthy and so many abuse their freedom." These vague remarks constitute all of Malone's comments on the social, political and legal battle over segregation going on all about him. Scot French and Edward Ayers, in their 1993 article "The Strange Career of Thomas Jefferson," argued that "Malone refused to concede Jefferson to southern segregationists who used Jefferson

to defend an unjust status quo." Yet, the authors referred only to a private letter as evidence of this defiance, and while Malone did assuredly loathe the Southern extremists, he kept it to himself. Malone simply did not publicly go on record to defend his revered hero against segregationist hijack.⁷⁴

Merrill Peterson wrote eight texts on Jefferson over the same period, including his impressive book on the history of the Jefferson image through the New Deal, but none dealt significantly with the issues that segregationists forwarded. The Jefferson Image in the American Mind did include an off-hand reference to the interpositionists, which served simply to dismiss their impact as insignificant against the heroic image of Jefferson: "Although [the Kentucky and Virginia] Resolutions served the reactionary cause of Southern segregationists, they performed a greater service, one authenticated by the latest historical judgment, in directly connecting Jefferson to the champions of freedom a century and a half later." Although Jefferson's image could be found throughout the front pages of the nation's newspapers through the interposition controversy, Peterson chose to end his study, which he had initially completed as his Harvard dissertation in 1950, with the 1943 construction of the Jefferson Memorial.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Text of radio program published as The Jeffersonian Legacies Dumas Malone, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954); "At Home with Thomas Jefferson," New York Times Magazine 1 July 1956, 8-9, 18-19; "Was Washington the Greatest American?," New York Times Magazine 16 February 1958, 11, 30, 32, 35; Dumas Malone, "The Relevance of Mr. Jefferson," Virginia Quarterly Review 37 (Summer 1961): 346; *Ibid.*, 347; Scot A. French and Edward L. Ayers, "The Strange Career of Thomas Jefferson: Race and Slavery in American Memory, 1943-1993," Jeffersonian Legacies Peter S. Onuf, ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 420-421.

⁷⁵ Peterson, Jefferson Image in the American Mind, 457.

When, in 1967, he edited a volume of essays on Jefferson entitled Thomas Jefferson: A Profile, Peterson again chose not to update his study. In the introduction, Peterson had an opportunity to look at the quarter century that had passed since he had left Jefferson at the Tidal Basin in 1943. Instead, he again asserted that Jefferson had resigned from the political arena and celebrated the victory of Jeffersonian democracy over totalitarianism. This is not to suggest, however, that Peterson was completely ignorant of the issue. The Jefferson scholar did speak at a 1964 civil rights rally held in the shadow of the University of Virginia's Rotunda. Still, the public at large did not see the issue of civil rights and their reflections on the Jefferson image addressed in his scholarly writings.⁷⁶

Bernard Mayo, conversely, did attempt to discuss and counter the segregationists' arguments in his 1959 book Myths and Men: Patrick Henry, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson. Compiled from a series of lectures given at the University of Georgia in 1958, Mayo's book opposed the segregationists who had surrounded him in Athens, Georgia. Mused about what he saw as the "excesses and distortions of conservatives," Mayo argued that

the popular tide has overwhelmed all [conservative] attempt to exploit both his image and a dead past – whether it was the 'Liberty Leaguers' of the 1930s, the States' rights 'Jeffersonian Democrats' of the 1940s or the pro-segregation 'Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties' of the 1950s. Most interesting to observe have been today's ineffectual 'New Conservatives,' who lament the death in our time of a Jefferson shaped in their own anti-liberal image.

⁷⁶ Thomas Jefferson: A Profile Merrill D. Peterson, ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), vii-xi.

In words that echoed his fellow University of Virginia colleagues, Mayo supported a “vital and living” image of Jefferson and praised “the democracy he symbolized [that] has been severely tested, thus far successfully, by economic depression, world war, and today’s struggle against totalitarian tyranny.” The fifty-six year old Mayo further delineated the major points of the heroic Jefferson, and the sacred image that his generation had worked diligently to create.⁷⁷

Another historian, James Russell Wiggins, expressed his vision of Jefferson’s relevance to current issues in “Jefferson Through the Fog.” In the address, given at Monticello on Jefferson’s 216th birthday, April 13, 1959, Wiggins commended the state of Virginia for ending its campaign of massive resistance and committing to the cause of universal education. According to Wiggins, “the common impulse of so many Virginians, of all shades of belief, to preserve the educational institutions of this state, in spite of all hazard, surely must have arisen in part from the foundations that Thomas Jefferson laid.” He also admonished those who “mine the papers of Thomas Jefferson” to do so “at their own peril,” because of Jefferson’s innate ability to stand on both sides of difficult issues. For Wiggins, this was especially true on racial issues, because although Jefferson did see distinctions between blacks and whites, he also advocated the extinction of slavery. Wiggins concluded that “when we look at the combination of difficulties that now confront us, it must be borne in upon us that what we really need is

⁷⁷ Bernard Mayo, *Myths and Men: Patrick Henry, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1959), 62-63, *The Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties was Virginia’s version of the Citizens Council.*; Ibid.

Jefferson.” Lacking that impossibility, Wiggins admitted, we must avail ourselves of a study of Jefferson’s work: “We cannot place him at the conference tables where the fate of mankind upon this planet may be at stake; but we can place his philosophy there.” Like Mayo, Wiggins recognized and commented on the attempted conservative capture of Jefferson, and both did their best to celebrate the memorialized version of Jefferson rather than discuss the issues brought to light by the Southern extremists.⁷⁸

Other historians, especially Douglass Adair, would not be so emphatic in their celebration of the traditional Jefferson. Adair, who grew up in Alabama and received his bachelor’s degree from the University of the South, wrote an essay in 1960 entitled “The Jefferson Scandals.” It went unpublished until 1974, partly because Adair took his own life in 1968. In the article, Adair expressed despair over the future of the traditional Jefferson image and foresaw the crisis that emerged from the revitalization of the Sally Hemings story. With a clear vision that his Virginia colleagues did not possess, Adair contended that “the *context* in which the Jefferson scandal is being publicized in the mid-decade of the 20th century shows why the story of Sally Hemings is today being used by both Negroes and whites as a weapon in current politics to embitter the battle over Negro rights.” Of all his learned colleagues, only Adair perceived the growing calls for a revising of the postwar Jefferson image. Although it would eventually be on a much grander scale, for Adair the Hemings affair was the flashpoint.

The Ebony revival of the Jefferson scandals, with its sensational modernized

⁷⁸ James Russell Wiggins, *Jefferson Through the Fog: An Address Delivered at Monticello, April 13, 1959* (Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1959), 5; *Ibid.*, 7; *Ibid.*, 11; *Ibid.*, 18.

mixture of fact and fiction, is calculated to remind its Negro readers of one of the ugliest features of Negro-white relations in American history.... As such the publicizing today of the story of Jefferson's Negro concubines operates as a battle cry and a recruiting slogan for militant political action *now* in the battle for Negro rights.⁷⁹

To his credit, Adair also recognized how the segregationists' adoption of Jefferson would also be interpreted negatively in the end. Adair discussed a segregationist tract, in the same vein as Tom Brady's Black Monday, called Then My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night! Written by W. E. Debnam, a North Carolina journalist and radio commentator, the 1955 polemic also discussed the Sally Hemings story, but from a different angle. According to Debnam, the affair was proof that if segregation becomes a thing of the past, then so will the South, resulting in the "amalgamation and the destruction of both the white and Negro race." Debnam, who nearly won a 1956 election to the House of Representatives, further tried to link the story to recent statistics on sexually transmitted diseases and illegitimacy to demonstrate the intrinsic sexual irresponsibility of blacks. Adair expressed his concern about the implications of this volume and its effects on the public, because it "is sold today in drugstores and newsstands all over the South.... [and] has been widely reviewed and praised in Southern newspapers, and if it sells as well as the author's ... [1950] attack on Eleanor Roosevelt ... it will gain more than a quarter of a million readers."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Douglass Adair, Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair Trevor Colbourn, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 167. The Ebony revival is "Thomas Jefferson's Negro Grandchildren," November 1954, 78-80; Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 168; W.E. Debnam, Then My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night! (Raleigh, NC: The Graphic Press, 1955), 4; Adair, 167.

Although he would not live to see the agitated debate in the 1970s over the Hemings story, Adair was correct in his assertion that "by the mid-decades of the twentieth century, Callender's ancient attack on Jefferson was very much alive and was being regularly reprinted and circulated as 'the truth' in reputable mass-media publications to millions of modern Americans." However, Adair took issue with his colleagues' refusal to defend their heroic interpretations of Jefferson: "The professional historians ... did not deem the present-day proponents of the Hemings story worthy of the recognition a scholarly rebuttal would give them." Due to the failure to publish his arguments Adair's warnings went unheeded. In the end, Adair's essay, in the words of two recent commentators, would turn out to be only "a private expression of a liberal scholar's fear that extremists would distort the past to achieve their divisive aims." Adair's concerns would prove prophetic indeed.⁸¹

Jefferson scholars Dumas Malone and Merrill Peterson stood pat throughout the struggle over segregation; they were unwilling to enter the fray and defend their embattled subject from the criticism to which they had, through their heroic depictions of Jefferson, opened him up. It is likely that both scholars chose to stay away from the issue in order to maintain professional distance and objectivity. However, their silence consequently allowed the Citizens Councils, Tom Brady, and Roy Harris' Augusta

⁸¹ Ibid., 169. In Jefferson Image, Peterson does admit the article in Ebony - what he calls "the Negro analogue to Life magazine" - but dismisses it entirely, for the "legend would not have been born but for the Federalists; it would not have been revived but for the abolitionists ... [and then] it faded into the obscure recesses of the Jefferson image." Peterson, Jefferson Image in the American Mind, 187; French and Ayers, 424; Ibid.

Courier the opportunity to attack in Jefferson's heroic mantle. African-American writers and other sympathetic historians deepened the critique first begun in the mid-1950s, by amplifying the Sally Hemings narrative, Jefferson's racial views, and his Notes on the State of Virginia writings on the inferiority of blacks. Outside of the "Jefferson camp," a handful of historians began to embrace the Hemings story, other racial issues, and even analyze some seemingly uncharacteristic episodes in Jefferson's political career. Legitimate, scholarly history that looked upon Jefferson with a critical yet more inclusive eye started to fill bookshelves in ever increasing numbers.

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Gordon Wood, in his 1993 essay, "The Trials and Tribulations of Thomas Jefferson," summarized the attitudes of a group of historians who did not share in the consensus "heroic" imagery of Jefferson, asserting that these scholars "concluded that something was seriously wrong with America. And if something [was] wrong with America, then something [had] to be wrong with Jefferson." Publications by dissenting historians began in the mid-1950s, eventually growing into a steady assault on the memorialized version of Jefferson. Monographs by Joseph C. Furnas, Leonard Levy, Winthrop D. Jordan, Robert McColley, and a documentary play by Martin Duberman all took a critical view of Jefferson. Although not as well-known as Malone, Peterson, or Boyd in their fields, these historians' arguments, when placed in the context of the

Southern campaign to recruit Jefferson and the attacks by Black Power partisans, carried significant weight in determining the future of Jefferson's reputation.⁸²

In the summer of 1956, the Georgia Review published an article by D.H. Ferris entitled "Jefferson Made to Order." Ferris's thesis was that the Democratic Party had co-opted Jefferson's true principles and that Roosevelt's New Deal had not realized Jeffersonian goals. According to Ferris, the idea that Jefferson was a liberal was "an absurd and very juvenile bit of apocryphy." Ferris mirrored the climate of opinion that gripped Georgia at the height of the interposition trend and reflected extremists' attempts to link themselves to Jefferson:

If Jefferson's spirit is still in the world, then it has hidden in the oversoul of men like Cordell Hull, Senator Byrd, Senator George, Senator Russell, etc. His habitual, but not dogmatic, strict constructionist attitude toward the Constitution would be anathema to liberals because of the political and moral restraints it might impose.

Ferris also echoed concerns Southern conservatives shared about the New Deal's legacy of an expanding federal government. For Ferris, the Jeffersonian notion of an unintrusive government did not reconcile with Roosevelt's policies. He argued that "Jefferson's view that the best government was the least government could never be harmonized with the illimitable efforts and scope of government planning of the New Deal socialists. 'Jefferson' to them is only a pretty name, the same as 'Cadillac' or 'Longine'; they know they like it but they do not understand its workings." The natural extension of this impersonal and meddlesome federal power was rule by judicial fiat and hence the order

⁸² Gordon Wood, "The Trials and Tribulations of Thomas Jefferson," in Jeffersonian Legacies, 395.

to desegregate schools. According to Ferris and his other Southern sympathizers, Jefferson would not approve of such a government.⁸³

In contrast to Ferris's commentary on the Jefferson image and its misunderstood invocations by New Deal Democrats, a second publication in 1956 played a part in continuing the revival of the Sally Hemings affair. Joseph C. Furnas' Goodbye to Uncle Tom employed Jefferson as an archetypal antebellum slaveholder, and declared, in a bold statement for 1956, that the Sally Hemings story was in fact accurate. He proclaimed that "Jefferson was only one of many eminent and sometimes aristocratic slaveowners who left mulatto offspring for their admirers to deny or ignore." In a subsequent footnote Furnas explained the source for his assertion.

I am well aware that all Jeffersonians do not agree on this. But Miss Pearl M. Graham, who is said to have looked more thoroughly than anyone else into this aspect of Jefferson, is good enough to assure me that, dubious as much of the attached gossip probably is, "there can be no reasonable doubt that Jefferson had at least one slave mistress.

This admission of Graham's scholarly influence is significant. At the time Goodbye to Uncle Tom appeared, Pearl Graham had yet to make her entrance into the Sally Hemings debate. In 1961, her essay in the Journal of Negro History showed a lack of restraint in relating the story; her writing was heavy and unbalanced, and clearly expressed an agenda. It is plausible to assume, then, that some form of this bias found its way into

⁸³ D.H. Ferris, "Jefferson Made to Order," Georgia Review 10 (Summer 1956): 131; *Ibid.*, 132; *Ibid.*; Ferris further expressed concerns about the apparent disparity between the judicial, executive and legislative branches: "[Jefferson] would have been one of the leaders ... in opposing any imbalance among the three branches of the Government which he had done so much to build." Ferris, 134.

Furnas' text due to his reliance on her research. Furnas' assertion, however, still had an effect on bringing the story of Sally Hemings into the accepted Jeffersonian canon.⁸⁴

In his analysis of the innate racism of slaveholders, Furnas used Jefferson as a model. In damaging descriptions, the author contended that "with whatever reluctance, he clung to his 'suspicion,' admittedly unproved, that those whom he called 'blacks' and discussed in terms appropriate to the stockyards were innate inferiors of their white masters." This is a reference to Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia, written primarily for a French audience in 1784. In his section on "Laws," Jefferson detailed his impressions of the mental and cultural inferiority of his black slaves. Although, as Furnas described, he admitted his views as "suspicion" only, the passages were taken as strong evidence in the case that Jefferson in fact advocated slavery; a view that conflicted with the memorialized image. Jefferson also denied the ability of contemporary blacks, most notably American poet Phyllis Wheatley. According to Furnas, "that great Virginia gentleman, George Washington, was courteous about the verses of little Phyllis Wheatley, the African-born, Yankee-sponsored Negro bluestocking, but Thomas Jefferson, a man of much higher formal cultivation than Washington, went out of his learned way unnecessarily to sneer at her." In Goodbye to Uncle Tom, Furnas did not employ the traditional imagery; instead he cast Jefferson as a racist and miscegenist.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ J.C. Furnas, Goodbye to Uncle Tom (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1956), 140; Ibid., note 1, a second source cited by Furnas is Frances Trollope, who in 1832 asserted that "the hospitable orgies for which Monticello was so celebrated were incomplete, unless the goblets [Jefferson] quaffed were tendered by the trembling hand of his own slavish offspring." Frances Trollope, The Domestic Manners of the Americans (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Company, 1832), 1:72.

⁸⁵ Furnas, 289; Ibid., 306.

Furnas' book is an important entry in the changing Jefferson historiography because of its popularity. A best-seller and Book-of-the-Month Club choice, Goodbye to Uncle Tom was reviewed by magazines with huge circulations, and therefore gained a higher visibility than most scholarly works. "Here is a book on the Negro in America with a startling thesis," reviewed Time magazine, which also asserted that "some historians hold that even the great Jefferson fathered mulatto children." Like Gore Vidal's and Barbara Chase-Riboud's novels later in the 1970s, Furnas' book made the Hemings narrative accessible to thousands more American homes.⁸⁶

In his Pulitzer Prize winning The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, David Brion Davis described what he saw as one of the major sources that lay behind the changes in the Jefferson image:

During the past decade, however, the debate has taken new directions and the "Jefferson Image" – indeed the wider Founding Father image – has taken on a villainous hue. To the thousands of spectators who saw Martin B. Duberman's play, In White America, the actor cast as Jefferson had only to recite selected passage from Notes, often in a supercilious tone, to transform the father of democracy into the father of American racism.

In the early 1960s, Martin Duberman, then a professor of history at Princeton, began a project which told a story that he thought "neither popular journalism nor professional history has made much effort to tell." He looked to "describe what it has been like to be a Negro in this country" emotionally. In the preface to the published script of In White America, Duberman expressed his motivations in telling the African-American perspective as a documentary play: "I chose to tell this story on the stage, and through

⁸⁶ "Up From Slavery," Time, 25 June 1956, 90, 92, 94.

historical documents, because I wanted to combine the evocative power of the spoken word with the confirming power of historical fact. The spoken word is able to call for the binding emotions of pity and sympathy. Men would feel, not merely understand the Negro's story."⁸⁷

The two act play debuted on Halloween night, 1963 at New York City's Sheridan Square Playhouse; it consisted mostly of emotional readings of texts that related black experiences from the middle passage through the intimidation of an unnamed fifteen-year-old girl at Central High School in Little Rock, 1957. Duberman opened the play with the recollection of a ship's doctor about conditions aboard slave ships, which was followed by the selective reading of the Quaker's 1790 petition to the United States Senate protesting the institution of slavery. The next voice after these textual recitations was the narrator: "The whole question on the Negro's place in American life continued to disturb a few thoughtful men. Among them was Thomas Jefferson." The description of Jefferson as a "thoughtful" man mislead the audience because the long passages that followed did not uphold the traditional image of the author of the Declaration of Independence. Duberman had the actor relate, "in a supercilious tone" according to David Brion Davis, Jefferson's racial inferiority assertions in Notes on the State of Virginia, including his pseudo-scientific examination of their personalities, mental capabilities and potential for reasoning. Duberman also included, ironically, to the

⁸⁷ David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 166; Martin B. Duberman, In White America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), xi; *Ibid.*, xi-x.

delight of Southern extremists, the full text of the infamous quotation from Jefferson's Autobiography.⁸⁸

However, the dramatic device that follows the lengthy recitation of Jefferson's writings is the most powerful of all. Duberman had a character, named simply "Negro Actor," sing two verses of a spiritual. What is intriguing about the song is the supposed target of the lyrics; they are not for the audience's benefit but rather are aimed directly at Jefferson.

*My old missus promised me,
Hm-mm-mm,
When she die, gonna set me free,
Hm-mm-mm.*

*Missus die nine years ago
Hm-mm-mm,
Here ah is in the same old row
Hm-mm-mm.*

Suddenly the audience saw Jefferson as a flawed racist, one who promised to free the hopeful slave but eventually failed, instead allowing his charges to remain in chains.

Duberman's placement of these lyrics after the racial allegations of the author of "all men are created equal" was pointed criticism indeed. The commentary was more than a bit heavy-handed, but equally evocative and effective. Viewers could not possibly leave In White America with a heroic recollection of Jefferson. Duberman's assault constituted a powerful entry into the ever-shifting Jefferson debate. After these first criticisms began in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the celebratory images crafted by Peterson, Malone and

⁸⁸ Ibid., 9-10.

Boyd would have to make room for alternative, more sobering portraits. Future submissions that took umbrage with the Charlottesville Jefferson would complicate and crowd the portrait to an even greater degree, starting a trend that eventually threatened the very survival of Malone's artistry.⁸⁹

In 1964, Robert McColley expanded his University of California, Berkeley dissertation into a monograph entitled Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia. McColley's purpose was to investigate the "influences of slavery on the life, the thought, and the politics of Jeffersonian Virginia." Thomas Jefferson and the problematic role slavery played in his life were at the center of McColley's study. Echoing many of the other sentiments of his fellow critics, he detailed Jefferson's writings in Notes on the State of Virginia on racial inferiority and declared that "even if the average planter held views on the Negro question identical to those of Thomas Jefferson, slavery would have remained fixed in Virginia, for the most liberal of all Virginia statesmen was himself unable to find a practical means to dismantle the institution he freely acknowledged as a curse." Like many civil rights advocates in the early 60s, McColley saw Jefferson as caught on the horns of a great dilemma. However, McColley did not see this paradox in a sympathetic light. In the words of reviewer Eugene Genovese, McColley "vigorously attacks the Jeffersonians for allegedly talking antislavery [but] working to strengthen and expand it."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Robert McColley, Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), 1; Ibid., 124; Eugene Genovese, review of Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia, by Robert McColley, In American Historical Review 71 (October 1965): 302.

Significantly, the University of Illinois professor also took on those in the "Jefferson camp." According to McColley,

A legion of general historians and biographers have endowed Jefferson with the most exalted reputation in American history among intellectuals. Reflecting on Jefferson's experience with and attitudes toward slavery, they have cited Jefferson's attacks on the institution with commendable thoroughness, but have been much less conscientious both in tracing his provincial views of the character and capacity of the Negro and in acknowledging the degree to which Jeffersonian politics tended to promote and extend the planting interests of the South.

In McColley's opinion, "from the 1770s onward there were also serious and dedicated men in Europe, the northern states, and even in Virginia who demonstrated in practices as well as theory that the Negro slave could be educated, emancipated, and civilized.

Jefferson, was not ahead, but rather far behind." This view of Jefferson as the antithesis of a visionary egalitarian began to expand and deepen with additional revisionist interpretations.⁹¹

In Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia and In White America, McColley and Duberman amplified an attack that had in fact appeared a few months earlier. Published by Harvard University Press, Leonard W. Levy's Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side forcefully described episodes in Jefferson's political career that refracted a very dim light onto the heroic image. In his preface, Levy clearly identified his objective: "Historians and biographers have fixed a libertarian halo around the brow of Thomas Jefferson as if he were a plaster saint, a seraph or a demigod. That halo is, in part, the target of this book. Aiming at haloes is a destructive business." Levy

⁹¹ McColley, 131; Ibid.

discovered several events that formed “a strong pattern of unlibertarian, even anti-libertarian thought and behavior extending throughout Jefferson’s career.” Through Jefferson’s dealings with renegade Vice-President Aaron Burr, his bitter battle over the Embargo, his tenure as governor of Virginia and as creator of the University of Virginia, Levy proclaimed that Jefferson

supported loyalty oaths; countenanced internment camps for political suspects; drafted a bill of attainder; urged prosecutions for seditious libels; trampled on the Fourth Amendment; condoned military despotism; used the Army to enforce laws in time of peace; censored reading; chose professors for their political opinions; and endorsed the doctrine that the ends, however odious, were justified by the means.⁹²

In his preface to the 1972 paperback edition of The Darker Side, Levy detailed the response he received in 1963 from his thesis. It sheds revealing light on the power and hold the heroic Jefferson image had on historians:

I distributed copies of the manuscript to twenty readers.... Most readers reacted as if I had engaged in a sort of secularized blasphemy, like desecration of the flag. They felt hurt and angry, as if they had a personal stake in Jefferson’s reputation as the apostle of liberty and I had attacked an article of unquestionable faith. Several readers strongly objected to the very conception of the book – the presentation of just the ‘darker side’ of Jefferson’s record on civil liberties. Almost to a man they criticized me for lacking balance and writing an indictment or prosecutor’s brief.

Those who had staunchly endorsed the heroic image of Jefferson faced a direct challenge in Levy’s near polemic. A reflection of what Levy described as a backlash toward his assertions was the American Historical Review’s decision to have Dumas Malone review The Darker Side. Malone’s treatment was anything but disinterested, but it does show

⁹² Leonard W. Levy, Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), vii; *Ibid.*, x; *Ibid.*, 18.

the importance of Levy's work. Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side posed such a threat that the response had to come from the very core of the Charlottesville junta. To his credit, Malone showed remarkable restraint and civility in reviewing Levy's work, as one would expect from such an a scholar. Malone further showed that although tending to emphasize Jefferson's libertarian legacies, he was not a rigid hagiographer. He defended his work and the studies of his fellow colleagues in Charlottesville by arguing that

Levy has a strong aversion to conventional encomiums. I was not aware that recent historians and biographers had indulged in them conspicuously in connection with Jefferson. Some scholars, lovers of liberty in an age of totalitarian threat, may have tended to see in his protean character the sort of thing they most wanted to see ... [but] we may assume that these students [of Jefferson] ... are devoted to the cause of truth. I hope, however, that they can arrive at a closer approximation of the whole truth than Levy does or even attempts to do in this volume.

Later Malone criticized Levy's analysis by admitting that although "most of the facts assembled here as charges are incontestable as discrete facts ... at nearly every point, the worst construction is put on them in this brief for the prosecution." However, Malone finished the critique by conceding that "the man who is still the most famous American champion of individual liberties was an absolutist with respect to no freedom except that of the mind and spirit ... he was not always wise and just. He was not always reasonable, but he was more so than his major adversaries." Although not an oblivious hagiographer, Malone was still unwilling to accept criticism of his life-long subject by this "unbalanced and injudicious account."⁹³

⁹³ Leonard W. Levy, Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side (Chicago: Elephant Books, 1972; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), xi (page references are to reprint edition); Dumas Malone, review of Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side, by Leonard W. Levy, In American Historical Review 69 (April 1964): 787; *Ibid.*, 788; *Ibid.*, 789. *Ibid.*, 788.

The significance of Levy's book is its forceful assertion that the emperor had no clothes. According to a reviewer in the William and Mary Quarterly, "the author assumes that we are all familiar with the better side of Jefferson ... He takes it as his own business to present 'the darker side' of Jefferson even at the risk of producing 'a lawyer's brief or an indictment.'" Levy knew that any attempt to crack the marble image of Jefferson must be attempted with a sharp chisel and heavy mallet. For Joseph J. Ellis, Levy's work is of paramount importance. In his 1997 National Book Award winning American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson, Ellis declared that "you could look back and, with the advantage of hindsight, locate the moment with the tide began to turn in the 1960s. In 1963 Leonard Levy published Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side..." In his next sentence, however, Ellis discussed the magisterial book that subjected Jefferson's racism debate to its most critical examination.⁹⁴

According to Ellis, after Levy's Darker Side in 1963, "an even bigger blow fell in 1968 with the publication of Winthrop Jordan's White Over Black." Crafted from his 1960 Brown University Ph.D. dissertation, Jordan's book had a nearly unprecedented impact on the historical profession. His unique interpretation of evidence and fresh look at the heavily-studied topic of the origins of American racism turned the field upside-down. White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 swept the major awards for historical scholarship the following year, winning the National Book

⁹⁴ Joseph H. Harrison, Jr. review of Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side, by Leonard W. Levy, in William and Mary Quarterly 3rd series 21 (July 1964): 451; Joseph J. Ellis, American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997), 16.

Award, the Bancroft Prize, the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award and the Francis Parkman Prize. Any analysis of Jefferson in such a preeminent monograph would be deeply influential on both the Jefferson image and how future scholars would approach the issue of his racial views. James McPherson, in his American Historical Review critique of White Over Black, which he described as “the most important thesis in one of the most significant books on race relations to appear in recent years,” stated that “the chapter on Jefferson, a sharp critique of his racism, is perhaps the most controversial part of this study.” Indeed, Jordan included a lengthy investigation focused solely on how Jefferson interpreted race and the ways he discussed that question in his correspondence and other writings. For Jordan, Jefferson was the archetypal model of Southern society; he analyzed how the surrounding community approached the problem of race by investigating how Jefferson viewed racial issues. He argued that

in addition to his demonstrable impact upon other men, Jefferson is important – or perhaps more accurately, valuable to historical analysis – because he permits (without intending to) a depth and range of insight into the workings of ideas about Negroes within one man as he stood in relationship to his culture.... Thomas Jefferson was not a typical or ordinary man, but his enormous breadth of interest and his lack of originality make him an effective sounding board for the culture.⁹⁵

Jordan proceeded to outline in detail Jefferson’s complete views on race.

Reflecting the interpretations of some of the sixties’ egalitarian writers, the author focused upon what he saw as Jefferson’s “central dilemma: he hated slavery but thought

⁹⁵ Ibid.; James McPherson, review of White Over Black, by Winthrop Jordan, In American Historical Review 74 (October 1968): 269; Jordan, White Over Black, 429.

Negroes inferior to white men.” Jordan, raised and educated solely in New England, documented Jefferson’s struggles with his conscience over slavery, but still illustrated his racism as deeply embedded, which produced in him monumental “confusion.” Unlike Levy, Jordan dispassionately summarized Jefferson’s derisive writings on the abilities of his slaves in Notes on the State of Virginia and his overall “suspicion” that blacks were inherently inferior to white men. However, his lack of passion is more telling and perhaps more damaging; Jordan portrayed Jefferson as the model American racist who, despite knowing his predilections went against his larger libertarian views, was still unwilling to break with societal mores. According to Jordan, Jefferson “never recognized how deep-seated his anti-Negro feelings were.... He was firmly convinced ... that Negroes could never be incorporated into white society on equal terms.”⁹⁶

Jordan’s presentation was not a heavy-handed indictment of Jefferson, but instead a disappointed look at him as a potential opportunity lost; it was a powerful interpretation of Jefferson caught in a society where racism was a central tenet. Jefferson became simply one of the figures of the eighteenth century; he was not an exceptional Founding Father at all, but merely a racist product of his racist environment. For however much the subject troubled and worried him, Jefferson still fell prey to maintaining and even promoting the institution of slavery. Actually, Jordan contended that Jefferson’s racial views had great importance in defining Americans’ racial views in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In concluding his chapter on Jefferson, Jordan asserted that “his

⁹⁶ Ibid.; Ibid., 453; Ibid., 436.

derogation of the Negro revealed the latent possibilities inherent in an accumulated popular tradition of Negro inferiority; it constituted, for all its qualifications, the most intense, extensive and extreme formulation of anti-Negro 'thought' offered by any American in the thirty years after the Revolution.... More than any person he framed the terms of the debate still carried on today." This argument did not agree with the Charlottesville version of Jefferson, and the fact that it was promoted in White Over Black, one the most influential books of historical scholarship to come out of the 1960s, proved to be a critical revision of the image of Jefferson enshrined in the Tidal Basin memorial.⁹⁷

Jordan also devoted a full fifth of his chapter to the Sally Hemings narrative. Avoiding a partisan side in the debate, Jordan admitted that "Jefferson's paternity can be neither refuted nor proved from the known circumstances." In the words of a reviewer in the Journal of American History, "the author's intention is not ... to show that Jefferson was or was not the father of Sally Heming's five children ... but simply to demonstrate that such paternity would not have been inconsistent with what we know of Jefferson's life, attitudes, and personality. The reviewer finds this convincing." Thus, Jordan seized the revived Hemings story and gave it a legitimization it had not enjoyed in Ebony, or the Journal of Negro History. Because the Sally Hemings narrative appeared in White Over Black, it reached a level of acceptance it had never previously enjoyed. Jordan avoided

⁹⁷ Ibid., 481, Although Jordan does add that : "... Thomas Jefferson left to Americans something else which may in the long run have been of greater importance - his prejudice for freedom and his larger equalitarian faith." Still, this caveat cannot wipe away the strong arguments Jordan had compiled over the preceding fifty pages.; Ibid., 436.

taking a conclusive stand on the veracity of the story; instead he tied it into his overall thesis of embedded cultural racism, and provided clues as to the reasons behind the story's endurance. According to Jordan, "the subject is an unpalatable one for many Americans: the assertion that a great national figure was involved in miscegenation – this is the central supposed 'fact' of the Hemings matter – is one that Americans find difficult to treat as anything but a malicious accusation." Jordan, like his fellow critics of Jefferson, recognized the political motives that lay behind the promotion of the Hemings story, writing that "ever since Callender's day it has served the varied purpose of those seeking to degrade Jefferson for political or ideological reasons, of abolitionists, defamers of Virginia, the South, and even America in general, and both defenders or opponents of racial segregation." Winthrop Jordan was willing to connect the Hemings story to the surrounding debate that, by 1968, swirled about in both the Southern white and African-American communities. This acceptance therefore separated him from the Charlottesville scholars who still dedicated their careers to creating and defending the memorialized image of Thomas Jefferson.⁹⁸

Between the two groups of historians who either criticized or defended the traditional version of Jefferson, some definite patterns emerge: on one hand the two groups seem inherently different, while at the same time there are important qualities that both share. First, unlike Malone, Peterson and Mayo, the scholars who emphasized the kinks in Jefferson's armor did not study in the shadow of Monticello. McColley, born in

⁹⁸ Ibid., 466; David H. Fowler, review of *White Over Black*, by Winthrop Jordan, In *Journal of American History* 56 (September 1969): 345; Jordan, 465; Ibid., 464; Ibid., 465.

Salina, Kansas, earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Harvard University, but went to Berkeley in the mid-1950s for his doctorate. His first position was also far from Virginia, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Joseph Furnas, unattached to any university, lived in New York City as a freelance writer when he wrote Goodbye to Uncle Tom. Jordan completed his Ph.D. dissertation at Brown University, in New England, a region not traditionally known for its attachment to Jefferson. Levy and Duberman's backgrounds, however, are more complicated. Actually, Levy was a colleague of Peterson's at Brandeis University, while Duberman was part of the history department at Princeton, the same university where Boyd was editing Jefferson's papers. If geography did not determine the two different conclusions each group reached, could age differences have separated the two sets of scholars? Again, this analysis is complex. Furnas, born in 1905, was nearly the exact age of Boyd, Adair, and Mayo, while Levy was only two years younger than Merrill Peterson was. Therefore, Furnas and Levy probably shared with Malone and Peterson the generational influences of World War II and the victory over totalitarianism. Martin Duberman, Winthrop Jordan, and Robert McColley, however, reflected the generation of scholars that reached maturity in the late 60s – born in 1930, 1931, and 1933 respectively – nearly four decades after Malone. These three scholars were in graduate school during the late 50s, precisely during the period when the segregationists were “capturing” the image of Jefferson. Furthermore, they attended liberal universities in the Northeast and California, where the articles,

editorials and pictures in their local daily newspapers portrayed segregationists in a negative light.

The dissension of Levy, Duberman and Jordan cannot easily be explained away. Their interpretations of Jefferson called the heroic image into serious question. If no other books that questioned the heroic image had followed the works of those scholars, perhaps they could be portrayed as an anomaly, a fragmentation of opinion on Jefferson that eventually repaired itself. But it did not turn out to be an anomaly: in actuality, the arguments of Levy, Furnas, McColley, Ferris, Duberman, and most of all Jordan, became the precursors of what would be a commitment to replace Thomas Jefferson's bust with that of a more accurate and worthy personage.

With this criticism, the center began to cave under the two-pronged attack from the left and right. Although Malone, Peterson, Boyd and other Jefferson scholars continued to write extremely popular and well-respected work – Malone won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975 for the first four volumes of Jefferson and His Time – the days of Jefferson's heroic image incontestably holding the field were numbered. In all, any methods liberals employed to police the Jefferson image had proved wholly ineffective, in part because Jefferson himself made their position a difficult one to maintain. Throughout the late 50s and 60s, the cries of dissension that began to grow louder and louder were met with silence from Northern and Southern moderates, ignorance of the issue from older Jefferson scholars, and a general fracturing of traditional interpretations. As the 1970s appeared on the horizon, so too loomed a crisis over the Jefferson image.

Even before Fawn Brodie published her controversial book in 1974, powerful criticisms had already exposed the vulnerable underbelly of the version of Jefferson represented by the bronze statue that stood in the center of the Tidal Basin memorial.

Impacts on the Center: 1969-1992

Cracks started in the heroic image by James Kilpatrick, the Citizens Councils, Lerone Bennett, Malcolm X, and Winthrop Jordan would be blown into gaping holes in the 1970s by Fawn Brodie, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Gore Vidal, David Brion Davis, and other scholars. Although by 1970 Malone had only published half of his six-volume biography, the reaction against this version of Jefferson was already in full swing. Eric McKittrick, in his New York Review of Books critique of Malone's fourth volume and Peterson's new thousand-page biography Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation, summarized the developing backlash with a piercing analysis. In "The View from Jefferson's Camp," McKittrick took the Charlottesville image of Jefferson to task :

you have no independent position from which to view the man Jefferson in some other way.... If your host literally cannot imagine Thomas Jefferson as other than all that is finest and best not only in a gentleman but in the entire American tradition itself, how can you? ... What about those traits of character that aren't heroic from any angle, those scenes in which Thomas Jefferson could look a good deal less than noble, like anything but the defender of human liberty?

McKittrick's criticism mirrored the changes that had already shaped the Jefferson image by 1970, and he anticipated work that would call the traditional view into question even further.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Eric McKittrick, "The View from Jefferson's Camp," New York Review of Books, 17 December 1970, 36-37.

A second scholar, Fawn Brodie, seconded McKittrick's review in her 1971 Journal of Interdisciplinary History review essay of Malone and Peterson's books. In "Jefferson Biographers and the Psychology of Canonization," Brodie questioned the ability of Jefferson scholars to be objective in Charlottesville, where Jefferson is such a "local deity that one cannot help wondering if this in itself does not exercise a subtle direction..." In the review she also reprised arguments she forwarded a year earlier in an article in the Virginia Quarterly Review. That essay, revealingly entitled "The Political Hero in America: His Fate and His Future," argued that by the early 1970s Jefferson was "under bombardment." Furthermore, she added that "the careful Jefferson scholar cannot escape a still more troublesome problem in regard to the heroic image, [which is] how to handle what can best be described as 'the great Jefferson taboo.'" This "taboo" – the Sally Hemings affair – would be Brodie's "claim to fame" in the coming years. In the 1971 Malone and Peterson review, she argued that "...Jefferson biographers have been extremely protective of [his] inner life, or rather of his intimate life ... There is important material in the documents which the biographers belittle; there is controversial material which they flatly disregard as libelous, though it cries out for careful analysis." She would again take up this topic of Jefferson's inner life, and the role Sally Hemings played in it, in a highly-anticipated and very successful best-selling book, thus becoming the primary standard-bearer for the narrative's ultimate legitimization.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Fawn Brodie, "The Political Hero in America: His Fate and His Future," Virginia Quarterly Review 46 (Winter 1970): 56; *Ibid.*, 58; Fawn Brodie, "Jefferson Biographers and the Psychology of Canonization," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 2 (Summer 1971): 157; *Ibid.*, 161.

Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History impacted the memorialized Jefferson image in 1974. At the center of the book is Jefferson's relationship with Hemings, which Brodie argued was a long-term, mutually fulfilling connection. As with her other publications leading up to An Intimate History, Brodie did not attack Jefferson, but his Charlottesville defenders. She argued that "even today the Jefferson scholars wary of the impulse to sanctify are nevertheless often its victim; they glorify and protect by nuance, by omission, by subtle repudiation, without being in at least aware of the strength of their commitment to canonization." Brodie's use of psychoanalytic theory in order to seek out Jefferson's "heart" brought extended criticism. A commentator in Reviews in American History, for example, contended that "psychological tools can be useful to writers of biography ... they must, however, be used with some restraint and with a recognition of their limitations. Mrs. Brodie has misused them, and in so doing she has badly set back the calling of psychobiography." Still, Brodie's biography widened the arena of debate to a larger audience, and it spoke to the larger implications of the public versus private debate, and it went further in including the viewpoint of other participant in the affair, Sally Hemings.¹⁰¹

The debate surrounding An Intimate History has been well documented. In their article that stemmed from the 1993 Jefferson Legacies Conference at the University of Virginia, Scot French and Edward Ayers devoted several pages to Brodie's central themes and the subsequent debate that followed An Intimate History. While Malone did

¹⁰¹ Fawn Brodie, Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History (New York: Norton, 1974), 14; T. Harry Williams, "On the Couch at Monticello," Reviews in American History 2 (December 1974): 523.

his best to stay above the quarrel, other scholars took up a defense of the traditional version of Jefferson they had devoted a lifetime to create. Virginius Dabney, first in a 1979 article in the Virginia Cavalcade, and then more thoroughly in his full 1982 monograph The Jefferson Scandals: A Rebuttal offered exactly that, a response to Brodie's allegations. According to Dabney, "compared with Thomas Jefferson's spectacular and fearless role in establishing American independence and the democratic institutions that we know today, questions concerning his relations with one of his slaves, though decidedly disturbing, are of relatively minor importance."¹⁰²

Still, Brodie's embrace and amplification of the Hemings debate widened well-established cracks in Jefferson's heroic image. Black publications joined Brodie in her effort to humanize Jefferson. Jerry Knudson, a historian at the University of Kentucky, published an account of James Callender's original 1802 allegations of the Hemings story in the November 1969 issue of Negro History Bulletin. In 1975, just as Brodie's thesis affected the Jefferson image, Ebony magazine published "The Dilemma of Thomas Jefferson." The article, written by Carlysle Douglas, sharply analyzed the Jeffersonian paradox. Douglas saw the Sage of Monticello as

the slavemaster who railed against slavery, the miscegenator who abhorred race-mixing, the man of reason who spend a lifetime draped in a hairshirt of his own unresolved contradictions.... Here was a man capable, on the one hand of authoring the most eloquent and well-reasoned arguments on behalf of the rights of man, yet equally capable, when it suited him, of accepting as fact the most outrageous of myths

¹⁰² French and Ayers, 428-434; for a general survey see Raymond Allen, "An Historiographical Survey: Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings," (M.A. thesis, California State University, Fresno, 1994); Virginius Dabney and Jon Kukla, "The Monticello Scandals: History and Fiction," Virginia Cavalcade 29 (Autumn 1979): 53-61; Virginius Dabney, The Jefferson Scandals: A Rebuttal (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1981), 133.

and superstitions in arguing against the rights of other men. At once hero and fool, the third president of the United States emerges as both framer and victim of his own times.¹⁰³

Five years after the publication of Brodie's already influential biography, an African-American author, Barbara Chase-Riboud, wrote Sally Hemings: A Novel, which further disseminated the arguments of An Intimate History. Chase-Riboud's novel centered on the seldom considered perspective of the title character, not of her famous lover, and it hinged on the assumption that the two had a thirty-eight year relationship. According to the New York Times Book Review, Chase-Riboud's "Sally Hemings is beautiful, elegant, brainy, fiery and indestructible. Her Thomas Jefferson is a remote giant tortured by migraine and morality." In her acknowledgments, the author listed a few Jeffersonian source materials, including two monographs: Brodie's An Intimate History and Leonard Levy's Jefferson and Civil Liberties: A Darker Side. Thus sixteen years after it first criticized the heroic image, Levy's arguments again resurfaced in a widely popular novel. Historical fiction would indeed prove an excellent amplifier for Levy's views.¹⁰⁴

The Hemings debate called Thomas Jefferson's heroism into question, but critics vilified Jefferson on other fronts as well. Widely-acclaimed author Gore Vidal published Burr: A Novel in 1973, which portrayed Jefferson, both as a person and a political leader,

¹⁰³ Jerry W. Knudson, "Thomas Jefferson and James Thomson Callender: The Myth of 'Black Sally'," Negro History Bulletin 32 (November 1969): 15-22; Carlyle C. Douglas, "The Dilemma of Thomas Jefferson," Ebony 30 (August 1975): 60; Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Barbara Chase-Riboud, Sally Hemings: A Novel (New York: Viking Press, 1979); Martin Levin, review of Sally Hemings: A Novel, by Barbara Chase-Riboud, In New York Times Book Review, 28 October 1979, 14.

in a less than flattering light. One historian described Vidal's Jefferson as "a deceitful hypocrite, an 'intellectual dabbler' and a writer with 'a more than usual infelicity of style.'" The acknowledgments explained why Vidal characterized Jefferson so shabbily: "I had thought to give a bibliography but it would be endless, and political. As a subject American history is a battleground today and I would prefer to stay out of range. I will, however, admit to a bias ... for a small brilliant work by Leonard W. Levy called Jefferson and Civil Liberties." Like Chase-Riboud, Vidal's impressions of Jefferson came from Levy's treatment, further adding to the staying power of that 1963 treatment. George Dangerfield, in his critique of Burr for the New York Times Book Review, revealed the amount of Levy's interpretation Vidal employed: "[Levy's] is a dangerous book for those who have not studied Jefferson, and Vidal ... has frequent recourse to it, like a dram-drinker, with toxic results." Regardless of the outcome, the popularity of Burr, the number one best-selling work of fiction in the nation between December 8, 1973 and May 5, 1974, amplified Levy's criticisms of the heroic Jefferson among a general readership throughout America.¹⁰⁵

Another section of the memorialized image that came under increasing fire in the 1970s were Jefferson's views on slavery and racial inferiority. Beginning with a 1969 Journal of American History article by William Cohen, and continuing through several other monographs, the view of Jefferson as an unrequited racist slaveholder threatened to

¹⁰⁵ Gore Vidal, Burr: A Novel (New York: Random House, 1973), 564; Dabney, Jefferson Scandals, 53; George Dangerfield, review of Burr: A Novel, by Gore Vidal, In New York Times Book Review, 28 October 1973, 2.

eclipse the heroic image outright. Cohen's article "Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery," dealt with the paradox that simultaneously the author of "all men are created equal" was also one of eighteenth-century Virginia's largest slaveholders. Cohen, a recently minted Ph.D. from New York University, saw the anti-slavery viewpoints that Jefferson scholars had so greatly emphasized merely as "intellectual abstractions," while Jefferson's "racist beliefs were generally congruent with his actions." Cohen disagreed with the selection of Jefferson's writings inscribed on the panels in the Tidal Basin memorial. According to Cohen,

Jefferson's views on slavery and race suggest that his libertarian sentiments were more than counterbalanced by his conviction that Negroes were members of a race so alien and inferior that there was not hope that whites and blacks could coexist side by side on terms of equality. Jefferson's libertarian views, however, had virtually no impact upon his actions after 1784, and his belief in the inferiority of the slaves was completely congruent with his behavior as both a planter and a politician.

Agreeing with Jordan, Cohen contended that Jefferson did not fit the role of a founder of the abolitionist movement. He asserted that "when [Jefferson] dealt with runaways, sales of slaves, breeding, flogging, and manumissions, his behavior did not differ appreciably from that of other enlightened slaveholders who deplored needless cruelty, but would use whatever means they felt necessary to protect their peculiar form of property."¹⁰⁶

David Brion Davis joined Cohen and Jordan as another scholar who rhetorically asked: "Was Thomas Jefferson an authentic enemy of slavery?" In a lecture at Oxford University in 1970, Davis sought to explain whether "Jefferson's hostility toward slavery

¹⁰⁶ William Cohen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery," Journal of American History 56 (December 1969): 506; *Ibid.*, 514; *Ibid.*, 515.

[was] ever thoroughly internalized in the form of deeply felt commitment?" Davis emphasized the surrounding social forces, especially the economic assumptions of the Virginia planter class of which he was an important member, that limited Jefferson's ability to commit to the universal destruction of slavery. Five years later, in The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823, a sequel to his 1967 Pulitzer Prize winning The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, Davis continued his analysis of Jefferson's planter class mores that defined his anti-slavery views. According to Davis, "Jefferson's record on slavery can only be judged by the values of his contemporaries and by the consistency between his own professed beliefs and actions.... But for Jefferson the scale tipped heavily toward self-preservation, which meant the preservation of a social order based on slavery." Davis added that this decision did not come easily or wholeheartedly to Jefferson, "but when the chips were down, as in the Missouri crisis, he threw his weight behind slavery's expansion, and bequeathed to the South the image of anti-slavery as a Federalist mask for political and economic exploitation."¹⁰⁷

Still others, inside and out of the historical profession, studied the non-heroic versions of Jefferson. Jean Fagan Yellin argued in her 1972 book, The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863, that "a study of the characterization of black figures in American literature might be begun with Jefferson's Notes on Virginia." As Yellin concluded: "In Notes on Virginia he embraced both abolition and white

¹⁰⁷ David Brion Davis, Was Thomas Jefferson an Authentic Enemy of Slavery? (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 3-4; Ibid., 9; Davis, Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 183; Ibid., 184.

supremacy ... His Notes thus embodies both an assertion of human liberty, and a classic statement of the racism which has prevented its realization in America.”¹⁰⁸

In 1977, John Chester Miller offered his Wolf By the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery “as an addendum to the lengthy debate which revolves around the paradox that the author of the Declaration of Independence was one of the largest slaveholders of his time.” While not a critic of Jefferson, Miller remained guarded. According to one reviewer of Miller’s book, “here is neither a stereotyped Jefferson nor a quasi-fictional creation.” Miller’s balanced interpretation shows that “by expressing ‘suspicions’ of the inferiority of blacks, Jefferson considerably weakened the impact of his appeal for freedom for the slaves. The alleged inferiority of blacks served as a justification for slavery.” On the issue of his fathering children by Sally Hemings, however, Miller was more emphatic. He alluded to the fact that Jefferson sold his “children” and showed no affection to them at all, and, Miller concluded, “if these were actually his children, the conclusion is inescapable that he must be portrayed as a cold, heartless and callous man – the very antithesis of the Thomas Jefferson that emerges from the historical record.” Jefferson remained, for Miller, “immaculate, virtuous and above suspicion.”¹⁰⁹

In summary, throughout the years that followed the civil rights movement, a fervent and passionate debate over the image of Jefferson was taking place both in the

¹⁰⁸ Jean Fagin Yellin, The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863 (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 3, *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁹ John Chester Miller, Wolf By The Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery (New York: The Free Press, 1977), xii; Holman Hamilton, review of Wolf By the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery, by John Chester Miller, In American Historical Review, 83 (June 1978): 803; Miller, 57; *Ibid.*, 165-66; *Ibid.*, 169.

historical profession and in the larger national arena. Bickering back and forth took place into the early 1980s until the deaths of two of the main leaders of each "camp," Dumas Malone and Fawn Brodie. In the fall of 1992, to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's birth, a group of scholars came together at Mr. Jefferson's University to discuss the current state of the image. That conference provided an excellent gauge as to the historical consensus on the Jefferson image after the debates of the sixties and seventies had ended. The image agreed upon at the Jefferson Legacies Conference revealed the toll that the efforts began by Southern extremists in the late 1950s and the black militants who followed in the 1960s had taken on the memorialized image.

The Jefferson Legacies Conference, held over the course of six days in October 1992 at the University of Virginia, exposed the strains Jefferson's reputation had recently suffered. The commissioned papers, written by some of the most revered historians of the early republic, who were not necessarily Jefferson scholars, were gathered together in an edited volume entitled Jeffersonian Legacies. These essays reflected consensus the conference reached, on the contemporary image of Jefferson. According to Joseph Ellis in his review of Jeffersonian Legacies, only a "quick scan of the table of contents" will reveal that "the participants have come to bury Jefferson, not to praise him." Taken together, the essays illustrated the toll that thirty years of criticism aimed at the memorialized image had taken. In Ellis' words, "clearly the Jeffersonian legacy looks less alluring in 1993 than it did in 1943. Back then the liberal creed that Jefferson

symbolized had the ringing sound of an American hymn to freedom, equality and democracy. Now the hymn sounds more like an American lullaby.”¹¹⁰

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One of the fifteen essays in Jeffersonian Legacies dealt with the issue of how the Sally Hemings narrative shaped the Jefferson image from 1943 to 1993. Although authors Scot French and Edward Ayers crafted a thoughtful essay, they mistakenly focused their attention on the historians' ability to alter the image of Thomas Jefferson. As with Merrill Peterson thirty years before, in The Jefferson Image in the American Mind, what French and Ayers neglected to emphasize were the deep changes in the climate of opinion and the current political and cultural discussions that every day surrounded those historians who wrote about Jefferson.

For the Jefferson image, the 1950s and 1960s resembled the 1850s and 1860s. As Peterson chronicled, Southerners, in their attempts to maintain the institution of slavery and promote states' rights, doomed the Jefferson image to a period of precipitous decline. The crisis of the Civil War caused this decline, not the influence of any biography or historical treatise. In the mid-twentieth century, the political and social events of the civil rights movement and its backlash equally shaped how historians viewed the image of Thomas Jefferson. During the “second Reconstruction,” the segregationists, like their secessionist ancestors, campaigned to recruit Jefferson and “capture” his authority for their side. Although the segregationists praised Jefferson and revered him as a hero, the

¹¹⁰ Joseph J. Ellis, review of Jeffersonian Legacies, Peter S. Onuf, ed., In Journal of the Early Republic 13 (Winter 1993): 566; *Ibid.*, 567.

overall result of this association was not positive. Jefferson's image suffered because of its link to the image of the Southern extremists. The popular image of the Southern extremists who fought the Brown decision is among the least favorable in American history; the mention of their name connotes visions of Little Rock bayonets, attack dogs, bombed-out churches in Birmingham, and the body of murdered fourteen-year-old Emmitt Till. Historian Morton Sosna, in his book In Search of the Silent South, echoed this assertion:

Growing up in Chicago during the peak years of the civil rights movement, I first became conscious of the South through media coverage of the struggle. Needless to say, my impression of white Southerners was not flattering. I knew there must have been some who opposed the White Citizens Councils, the Klan, and the 'massive resistance' politicians, but why did they seem so few and so ineffective? Many Northerners were asking the same question.

The segregationists' campaign to capture Jefferson was an emphatic one, for he, along with Abraham Lincoln, is one of the most significant figures from America's past. The segregationists, ironically, did not focus simply on Jefferson's racial views; they also concentrated on political and constitutional viewpoints that they used for historical precedent and authority. The image, legacy, and reputation of Thomas Jefferson was at the center of the defense against the Supreme Court's desegregation decision in the late 1950s. By placing it there, the segregationists took the heroic image of Jefferson, which in the decade after World War II had reached its greatest pinnacle of popularity, and held it hostage.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Morton Sosna, In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), ix.

The capture of Jefferson by the Southern extremists in the late 1950s must be labeled a "hostage situation," because certainly this version of Jefferson stood in contrast to the main body of his rhetoric. Demagogues such as Roy Harris, James Eastland and W.E. Debnam did not agree with the tenets of Jeffersonian democracy. The rise to power of politicians such as Eastland, Ross Barnett and Herman Talmadge does symbolize, however, the potential extremes to which Jefferson's vehement stance against elite government could be taken. The segregationists took singular, isolated quotations of Jefferson's out of context and tried to appropriate his whole image with all its cultural baggage. In the appropriate words of historian Staughton Lynd, "in every case the Jeffersonian vocabulary was made to do service for more-than-Jeffersonian ends."¹¹²

By most accounts, Jefferson would not agree with the Southern segregationists if he returned, despite his contention that the two races could not survive in the same environment. Interpreters of the Jefferson image must first analyze the complex historical context in which he wrote in order to fully understand his views. Politics and personal relationships played major roles in shaping Jefferson's opinions. His denunciations of the judiciary stemmed in part from his personal rivalry with Chief Justice John Marshall, while his defense of states' rights in the 1798 Kentucky Resolutions was based on preserving, not limiting, civil liberties and in securing the survival of his Republican party. Furthermore, his racial views grew out of the surrounding slaveholding culture and Jefferson's place in the status-conscious planter

¹¹² Staughton Lynd, Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 89.

class. All the misquotations, skewed interpretations, and blatant hijacking, however, did not diminish the impact of the segregationists' late 1950s campaign. Southern extremists did succeed in capturing the image of Jefferson and holding him as a hostage throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s.

What made this hostage-taking even more momentous is that few voices arose in dissension. Black civil rights leaders, who in years past had also celebrated the author of "all men are created equal," chose not to defend this traditional but exclusionary version of Jefferson. Instead, they emphasized a grass roots, non-violent assault on Southern institutions, without making efforts to look back into a problematic American past. Philosophy played a minor role in the strides African-Americans made toward fulfilling Jefferson's sacred preamble of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson, as with the other Founding Fathers, simply became irrelevant.

However, as the civil rights movement matured and moved further to the left in the late 1960s, Jefferson came to symbolize for black leaders all that was inherently wrong with America. A growing emphasis on Black Power further cast Jefferson in a villainous hue. For civil rights activists, Jefferson's image now centered on his inability to free himself from slavery, his relationship with Sally Hemings and his views on black inferiority. Unlike the segregationists who also emphasized Jefferson's constitutional and political views, blacks concentrated entirely and effectively on race.

These developments, coupled with a noticeable silence from Northern and Southern moderates, had a drastic effect on how historians came to see Thomas Jefferson

in years to come. With silence from the mainstream, liberal historians who had traditionally praised Jefferson as the Apostle of Liberty, were left with little room to maneuver, so they too kept quiet. The prevailing Jefferson image that emerged from the 1950s and 1960s left a bad taste in the mouths of many historians, including some young graduate students whose opinions matured during the same period. In the early 1960s, historians such as Leonard Levy and Martin Duberman began attacking the heroic image of Jefferson; another major blow fell in 1968 with the widely-praised book of one of those young students, Winthrop Jordan. Although the center consensus of Malone and Peterson still held sway throughout the 1960s, the newest historiography began to show the effects of criticism from the left and right. The destruction of the marble pedestal upon which postwar celebrators placed the heroic image of Jefferson had already begun. By the 1990s, very little remained.

Or was there? Although the libertarian version of Jefferson so promoted in the years after America had defeated totalitarianism was wiped away, has a new one been constructed in its place? Now that historians and other commentators have shown Jefferson's feet of clay to the American people, he has in a sense become an even greater hero. A renewed emphasis on Jefferson's humanity, with all its inconsistencies, paradoxes and flaws, has produced a somewhat more embraceable Jefferson. Through debate and dissension, historians have painted Jefferson's humanness, and by doing so have linked him even tighter to the present, living generation, and to the essence of the history of the American people. Joseph Ellis' woeful eulogy in reviewing the 1990s

version of Thomas Jefferson laments the few remaining pieces of the memorialized image, the destruction of which he sees as comparable to the destruction of America. For millions of Americans previously excluded by the one-dimensional nature of the heroic image, the state of the Jefferson image in the 1990s is one to celebrate and accept as an example of America's growing ability to deal with its problematic past. Thomas Jefferson and his lasting legacy remain central to every part of that past, including its most vexing paradoxes. In the eloquent words of Gordon Wood, the sweeping changes that gripped the Jefferson image in the twentieth century "may seem like small and silly matters, but they are not – not where Jefferson is involved; for the nature of American society itself is at stake.... Everyone, it seems, sees America in Jefferson."¹¹³

¹¹³ Gordon Wood, "The Trials and Tribulations of Thomas Jefferson," in Jeffersonian Legacies, 398.

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Appendix

Figure 1

"Lighting the Way"

Richmond News-Leader
November 28, 1955



Figure 2

"Famous Quotations"

One of the blotters that came as part of the "educational materials" packet sent to each new member of the Citizens Councils.

FAMOUS QUOTATIONS



THOMAS JEFFERSON

"Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these (negro) people are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion have drawn indelible lines of distinction between them. It is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation and deportation, peaceably, and in such slow degree, as that the evil will wear off insensibly, and their place be, *pari passu*, filled up by free white laborers. If, on the contrary, it is left to force itself on, human nature must shudder at the prospect held up. We should in vain look for an example in the Spanish deportation or deletion of the Moors. This precedent would fall far short of our case." — Page 164, *Life Writings and Opinions of Thomas Jefferson*. By B. L. Rayner. Pub. N. Y. 1832. Library of Congress Class "E332", Book "R 26."



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Figure 3

"Democracy Long Overdue"

Norfolk Journal and Guide

April 22, 1956

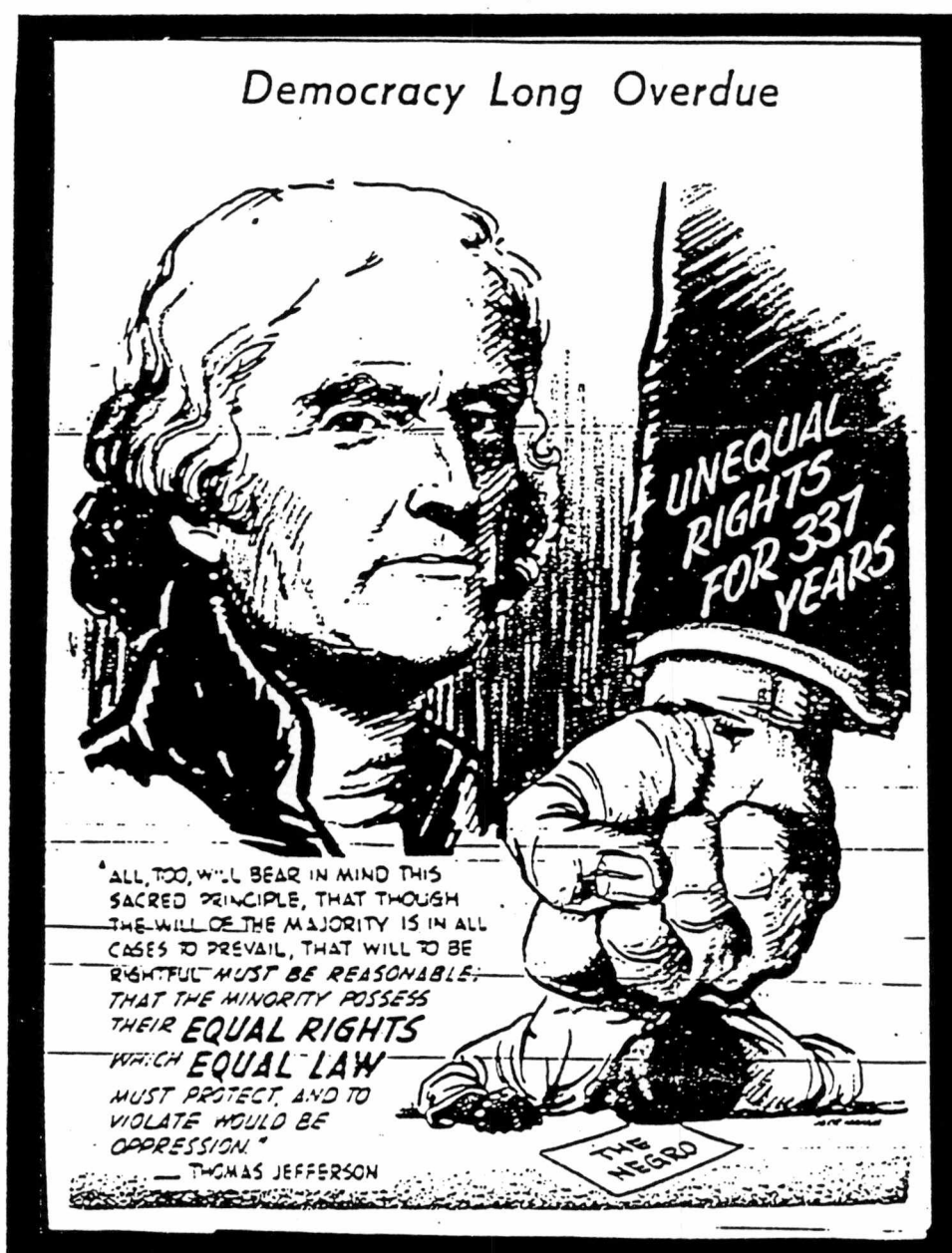


Figure 4

"... That All Men Are Created Equal ..."

Louisville Courier-Journal

July 4, 1964



Vita

Robert Glenn Parkinson was born in Ridgewood, New Jersey on June 8, 1973. He attended schools in several states, ultimately graduating from high school in Okemos, Michigan in 1991. He attended the University of Tennessee from 1991 to 1995, graduating with honors in history bachelor's degree in August 1995. After entering the master's program in the fall of 1996, he completed requirements for the MA degree with this project in December 1998.