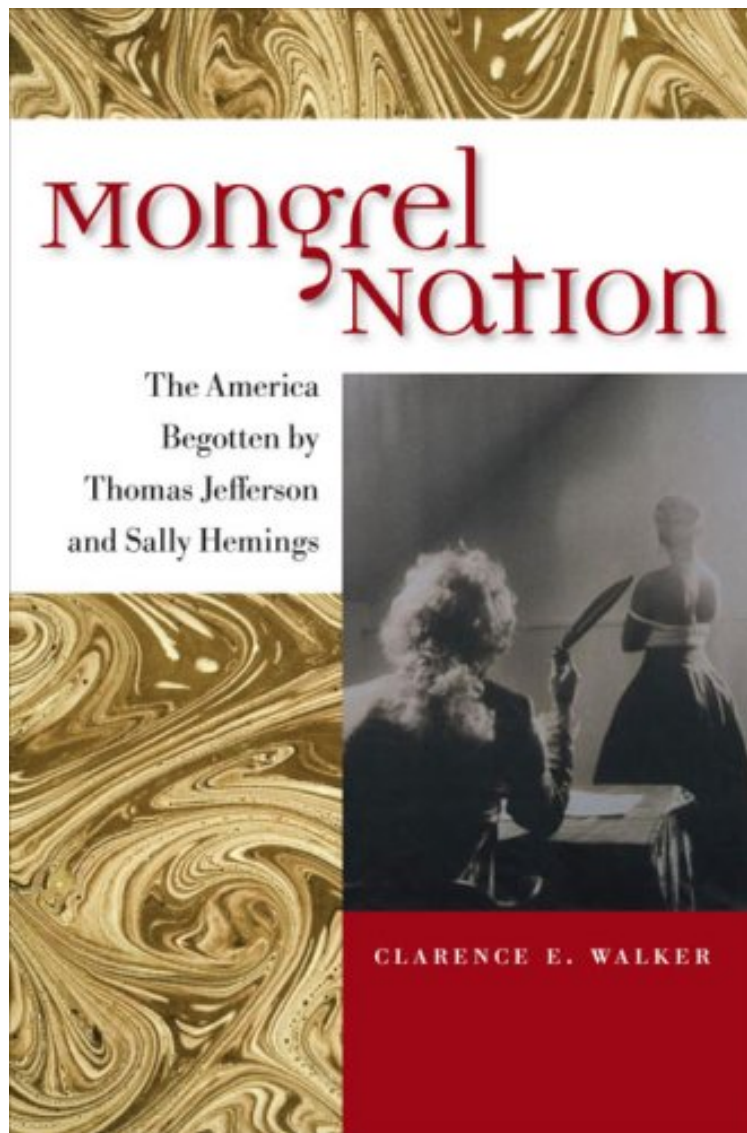


[Free read ebook] Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings (Jeffersonian America)

Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings (Jeffersonian America)

Clarence E. Walker

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Clarence E. Walker : **Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings (Jeffersonian America)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings (Jeffersonian America):

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Logical Affirmation, Brilliant Use of ContextBy NormProfessor

Walker has given us more than reasoned confirmation of what Americans have long suspected, at least since the 1802 revelations by James Callender. By weaving the Jefferson-Hemings liaison into a historical setting that accommodated such relationships more comfortably than we in the 21st Century have considered, he reminded us to look through the eyes of Thomas and Sally's contemporaries. Of course, the immediate white family had a different take on the situation regardless of truths they must have been aware of, and denial has persisted among their descendants. Walker has also made a compelling case for a historical mixed-race perspective in which we should all take pride. In my book *Diagnosing Jefferson* I touched only briefly on the benefit of viewing the liaison in a positive light. I'm pleased and humbled to say Professor Walker has put more into that. Based on what we know of Jefferson, and based on circumstances in which Sally found herself in Paris, what in the world else could anyone think would happen between the lonely, love-starved widower and the late Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson's young, gorgeous, look-alike half-sister? Especially when she was aware of her technical freedom to choose in a country that didn't recognize slavery, and especially when he was forsworn never to remarry. He wasn't going to become a monk, and she wasn't going to watch her god-like brother-in-law suffer for want of the affections of a down-home woman. After the DNA flap some years back, reputable historians like Joseph J. Ellis agonized over the findings, as though forgetting that Thomas was exactly as human as he (Ellis) had been describing in his writings. As for Sally, she must have been a bright young woman, for much boils down to the question: What kind of woman would Thomas Jefferson have wanted to give amorous attention to (in apparent total loyalty, judging from his Memorandum Books) for 38 years till death? The only criticism I might make of Walker's work is in his going low-key over the possible influence of Sally's mother, Elizabeth, and other family members who'd bedded white men and, in some ways, gained thereby. I don't believe 14-year-old Sally would have been chosen at the last moment to sail to Paris with Thomas's daughter Polly had the Hemings matriarch Elizabeth not been strongly involved, for the major white player in that send-off was yet another blood relation to the Hemings clan, Elizabeth Eppes. All in all, *Mongrel Nation* is a must-read for people who appreciate Thomas's and Sally's contribution to the United States's mixed-race heritage, and it's time we gave prominence to that contribution.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By tnracer
Excellent. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great insight into race today
By Wendy B. Hanawalt
Walker's book is about the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Heming, but it ripples out across the years to politics today. Walker's discussion of America's peculiar obsession with being seen as a "white" nation informs our undersetanding of today's headlines, particularly why The Birthers are obsessed with proving that President Obama is not "one of us" and the Tea Party's love affair with the Founding Fathers. This little piece of history is deftly written, a quick and fascinating read. I recommend it very highly.

The debate over the affair between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings rarely rises above the question of "Did they or didn't they?" But lost in the argument over the existence of such a relationship are equally urgent questions about a history that is more complex, both sexually and culturally, than most of us realize. *Mongrel Nation* seeks to uncover this complexity, as well as the reasons it is so often obscured. Clarence Walker contends that the relationship between Jefferson and Hemings must be seen not in isolation but in the broader context of interracial affairs within the plantation complex. Viewed from this perspective, the relationship was not unusual or aberrant but was fairly typical. For many, this is a disturbing realization, because it forces us to abandon the idea of American exceptionalism and re-examine slavery in America as part of a long, global history of slaveholders frequently crossing the color line. More than many other societies--and despite our obvious mixed-race population--our nation has displayed particular reluctance to acknowledge this dynamic. In a country where, as early as 1662, interracial sex was already punishable by law, an understanding of the Hemings-Jefferson relationship has consistently met with resistance. From Jefferson's time to our own, the general public denied--or remained oblivious to--the possibility of the affair. Historians, too, dismissed the idea, even when confronted with compelling arguments by fellow scholars. It took the DNA findings of 1998 to persuade many (although, to this day, doubters remain). The refusal to admit the likelihood of this union between master and slave stems, of course, from Jefferson's symbolic significance as a Founding Father. The president's apologists, both before and after the DNA findings, have constructed an iconic Jefferson that tells us more about their own beliefs--and the often alarming demands of those beliefs--than it does about the interaction between slave owners and slaves. Much more than a search for the facts about two individuals, the debate over Jefferson and Hemings is emblematic of tensions in our society between competing conceptions of race and of our nation.

From Booklist*Starred * Thomas Jefferson's heroic stature as an Enlightenment archetype, author of the Declaration of Independence, and the third president has always made his positions on race particularly troubling in a nation that wants to think of itself as just and equitable and also racially pure. Historian Walker uses the contradictions between Jefferson's writings on race and his 38-year relationship with his slave Sally Hemings as a prism through which to view the complexities of American race relations. In the first part of this slim volume, Walker argues that Jefferson and Hemings are rightly the "founding parents" of the nation, signifying the racial mixture of America from its early years. In the second part, Walker examines the heated debate pre- and post-DNA testing in 1998 that confirmed

Jefferson DNA in Hemings' offspring. So powerful has been the notion of a pure white origin for the nation and its founders that even scholars have gone to great lengths to deny that Jefferson, like so many other powerful white men, was "in the closet" in terms of interracial sexual relations, forced or consensual. Walker maintains that unless the nation can fully recognize the Jefferson-Hemings relationship, it can never have a true sense of its identity. --Vanessa Bush "America has indeed been a mongrel nation, not just in terms of blood, but in terms of culture and politics, from the very beginning. Walker very rightly challenges the assumption that the Jefferson-Hemings liaison was either unusual or exceptional. He provides critical insight that will not only enlighten general readers, but will spur other scholars to explore the range of sources and material they consider when writing about Jefferson and Hemings, as well as other mixed families in slavery. The importance of this cannot be overstated." -Annette Gordon-Reed, New York Law School, author of *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* "America has indeed been a mongrel nation, not just in terms of blood, but in terms of culture and politics, from the very beginning. Walker very rightly challenges the assumption that the Jefferson-Hemings liaison was either unusual or exceptional. He provides critical insight that not only will enlighten general readers but will spur other scholars to explore the range of sources and material they consider when writing about Jefferson and Hemings, as well as other mixed families in slavery. The importance of this cannot be overstated."