TOM JEFFERSON WAS NO BILL CLINTON

Nature, the respected British scientific journal, exploded what appeared to be a historical bombshell in its issue of November 5, 1998. The bombshell was exploded with this teaser on the cover of its web page.

Presidential paternity established

Scandals involving American presidents are nothing new. In 1802 President Thomas Jefferson was accused of fathering a child by Sally Hemings, one of his slaves. A molecular genetics study in the 5th November issue of Nature finally puts the affair to rest, establishing beyond reasonable doubt Thomas Jefferson’s relationship to Sally Hemings’ sons.

An article by Dr. Eugene A. Foster and others described the molecular genetics study, which involved analysis of DNA from the Y chromosomes of male-line descendants of Jefferson’s paternal uncle, Field Jefferson, and male-line descendants of two of Sally Hemings’ sons, her first-born, Thomas Woodson and her last son, Eston Hemings Jefferson. It pointed out that the Y chromosome passes unchanged from father to son, apart from occasional mutations. Five male descendants of Field Jefferson were used in this study because Thomas Jefferson had no sons to carry on the line. The five descendants of Field Jefferson were found to all share a rare characteristic.

It was found that none of the five descendants of Hemings’ first son, Thomas Woodson, shared this characteristic. That is considered to be proof that Thomas Jefferson was not Thomas Woodson’s father, an allegation published by a Richmond newspaper in 1802 and a claim that Woodson’s descendants believed to be true. There was only one descendant of Eston in the study. His Y chromosomes had the rare Jefferson characteristic. That was what Nature trumpeted as establishing beyond reasonable doubt “Thomas Jefferson’s relationship to Sally Hemings’ sons.”

The article itself was a little more cautious. It said that it was 100 times more likely that Jefferson was the father of Eston than that “someone unrelated (to Jefferson) was the father.” It also observed that a male-line descendant of Field Jefferson could conceivably have sired a son by a female ancestor of “the presumed male-line descendant of Eston. The authors said, “In the absence of historical evidence to support such possibilities, we consider them to be unlikely.” But the article’s headline threw caution to the wind. It read, “Jefferson fathered slave’s last child.”

An accompanying article by historian Joseph J. Ellis and MIT biologist Eric S. Lander said the study provided “strong evidence that Jefferson fathered at least one of Hemings’ children.” It then discussed the significance of this finding as though it were proof that Jefferson had a relationship with Sally Hemings that was one of “lust and rape” or “a love story rooted in mutual affection” or something in-between. It suggested that Jefferson’s conduct was likely to be compared with Clinton’s sexual indiscretions which gave rise to the impeachment hearings. The authors saw some striking parallels.

“Both improper relationships involved women about 28 years younger....Both presidents seem to have engaged in politically reckless conduct; in Jefferson’s case, fathering Eston six years after allegations appeared in the national press. And both offered evasive denials to the charges. In 1805 the Massachusetts legislature staged a mock impeachment trial of Jefferson, citing several grievances including the accusations about Sally Hemings.”

Ellis, the author of American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson, had previously rejected the claims that the president had an improper relationship with a slave, his wife’s half-sister. But the DNA evidence changed his mind. He concluded the article saying, “As an icon, Jefferson’s legacy has been reinterpreted by every generation. Now, with impeccable timing, Jefferson reappears to remind us of a truth that should be self-evident. Our heroes—and especially presidents—are not gods or saints, but flesh-and-blood humans, with all the frailties and imperfections that this entails.”

A Crutch For Clinton

The impeccable timing, it appears, was the publication of these findings just when Bill Clinton needed a crutch to help him get through the mess he had created with his reckless sexual conduct. His supporters were buoyed up by the reports that
one of the four presidents whose image is carved into Mt. Rushmore also had a problem with sex. The ground for this was first laid by articles that ignored the understated caveats in the *Nature* articles that the evidence was very strong but not absolutely conclusive that Jefferson was Eston’s father.

For example, an article in the Nov. 9 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* by Barbra Murray and Brian Duffy said, “This week’s *Nature* presents the results of scientific tests that show a conclusive DNA match between a male descendant of Sally Hemings and another man who can trace his lineage to Thomas Jefferson’s paternal uncle....The evidence here, in other words, removes any shadow of a doubt that Thomas Jefferson sired at least one son by Sally Hemings.” This was one of many news stories that left the impression that there was little or no doubt that Sally Hemings was Thomas Jefferson’s mistress and the mother of one or more of his children.

The New York Times ran a front-page story Nov. 1 which began by saying the evidence was “compelling.” It quoted Dr. Lander, co-author of the second article in *Nature*, as saying: “The fact that Eston Hemings’ descendant has this rare chromosome, together with the historical evidence, seals the case that Jefferson fathered Eston.” The Washington Post was a tad more cautious. It said that genetic testing showed that Jefferson “almost certainly fathered a child with one of his slaves.”

These and similar stories in other publications inspired editorials and columns commenting on the claims that it had been proven that our third president had a sexual relationship with a slave. William Safire, The New York Times’ conservative columnist, suggested that this story broke just before election day because it conveyed a message that mimics the White House line—that presidents have their flaws and frailties. Safire said that if Jefferson impregnated a young slave and refused to admit it, “what’s the big deal about Clinton dangling with young women and lying under oath about it?”

Brent Staples, a black member of the editorial board of The New York Times, had a column in the same issue of the paper in which he did just what Safire said the White House wanted. He wrote, “The case shows that Jefferson lied about sex in the last century just as William Jefferson Clinton did in this one.” Staples speculated about the nature of the relationship Jefferson had with Sally. Was it a loving relationship, or was she a rape victim? He didn’t make any further comparisons with Bill Clinton, but he condemned Jefferson for owning slaves and believing blacks were inferior to whites. One might easily infer that Clinton is the better man of the two.

Washington Post columnist Donna Britt, who is also black, wrote that the revelations that allegedly prove that Sally Hemings had one or more children by Thomas Jefferson teaches us this lesson: “Even in today’s enlightened era of sexual harassment laws, some otherwise ‘nice’ employers cross the line, treating women—and some men—inappropriately.” Donna Britt may not have been thinking of Bill Clinton, but his name does come to mind when one talks about a man having an inappropriate relationship with a young woman. Britt concluded her column with the observation that we should recognize that our heroes “achieved greatness despite their inconsistencies” and that “unlike false gods, flawed heroes show us that nearly anyone can soar.” Those were very likely heartening words for our flawed President.

**Findings Fatally Flawed**

Thomas Jefferson may have been flawed, but the claims that the Foster study proves or even comes close to proving that he was the father of Eston Hemings Jefferson are false. He told The New York Times, “The genetic findings my collaborators and I reported...do not prove that Thomas Jefferson was the father of one of Sally Hemings’ children. We never made that claim nor do we believe that the Y-chromosome type we found in Hemings’ descendant occurs only in the members of the Jefferson family. This study could not prove anything conclusively.”

The chief reason why the study could not prove the paternity of Thomas Jefferson has been disclosed by Herman Barger, the Jefferson family researcher. Barger told Foster that Thomas Jefferson had a younger brother, Randolph, who was 12 years younger than Thomas. Randolph had five boys by his first wife. Isham, the oldest, was reared at Monticello. He would have been 27 when Eston was born. The youngest son would have been 21. Randolph himself was a widower from about 1793 to 1810 when he remarried. He was a frequent visitor to Monticello and was invited to come in August 1807, nine months before Eston’s birth. He was said to mingle with the slaves, “play the fiddle and dance half the night” In addition, Jefferson had two cousins, the sons of his uncle Field.

Barger believes that one of these eight men was the father of Eston. He thinks that Randolph is the one most likely to have had a steady relationship with Sally Hemings. After the birth of Thomas Woodson in 1789 or 1790, Hemings had no more children until 1795, two years after the death of Randolph’s wife. Instead of proving the claims that Jefferson was the father of Sally’s children, the DNA tests strengthen the claim that he was not. They prove that he was not the father of her first child. The long hiatus before her second child was born suggests that she was not having sex with Jefferson or anyone else.

Barger told Dr. Foster about Randolph and his sons, but they were not mentioned in his article. Foster did go to the trouble of testing the DNA of male descendants of the Carr brothers, the two sons of Jefferson’s sister. Historians had suggested they might have fathered children by Hemings, but of course their Y chromosomes weren’t from the Jefferson family and there was no match with the descendants of Hemings that were tested.

The likelihood, or even the possibility, that one of eight Jeffereisons in addition to Thomas might have been the father of Eston makes it impossible to say that the Foster findings even come close to proving that Thomas was the one. The omission of this fact from the Foster article raises a serious question about the integrity of Foster, if not his collaborators and the editors of *Nature*. The editors have been informed of this serious omission, but they have yet to publish an acknowledgment that their articles were badly flawed.
THE STORY THE MEDIA MISSED

The Nature articles and those based on them gave rise to comparisons between Thomas Jefferson and William Jefferson Clinton, with Jefferson generally made to look bad in comparison, pictured as a racist, a slaveholder, a hypocrite and possibly a rapist. While the media were having a field day discussing Jefferson’s alleged “inappropriate relationship” with Sally Hemings, they continued to ignore the charges that Bill Clinton fathered a son by a black woman in 1984. The mother was a hooker named Bobbie Ann Williams, who claims that Bill Clinton was a frequent client in the period in which her son Danny was conceived. Danny now lives in Little Rock with Shirley Howard, his mother’s sister.

Rumors about the governor’s illegitimate black son were circulating in Little Rock in 1991, when Clinton was considering entering the race for the Democratic nomination for president in 1992. Campaign magazine published an interview with Cokie Roberts, and one of the questions she was asked was if Clinton were to seek the nomination, would she and other reporters question him about the rumors that he was the father of a black child. Cokie Roberts said of course they would. Clinton entered the race, but we have seen no indication that Cokie or other reporters representing the national media ever asked the question during the campaign or since.

Silencing “Say” And Ignoring The Globe

A well-known Little Rock black businessman named Robert “Say” McIntosh created a stir by raising questions about it in flyers that he had distributed. McIntosh is famous for his sweet potato pies, which he advertises by distributing flyers. It was said that he had a money dispute with the state and that he was applying pressure or getting revenge by publicly raising questions about Danny Williams and his relationship to Gov. Clinton. McIntosh suddenly reversed gears, defending Clinton instead of attacking him. After Clinton won the presidential election, McIntosh was rewarded. While both Gov. Clinton and Lt. Gov. Jim Guy Tucker were out of town, the black speaker of the Arkansas House of Representatives became the acting governor. In that capacity he issued several pardons. One of them was for McIntosh’s son, who had been convicted on drug charges and was serving a long sentence.

The Feb. 18, 1992 issue of The Globe, a racy supermarket tabloid, carried the story of Danny Williams and the President of the United States. It had a photo of the boy, who was light-skinned and bore some resemblance to Bill Clinton. The Globe is not the most reliable of the supermarket tabloids, and its story was not taken seriously by one of the most responsible Clinton critics in Arkansas because of some recognizable factual errors and its lurid details, which appeared to be too wild even for Bill Clinton. It did not get picked up by the establishment media, which is not surprising. They were all squeamish about carrying the Gennifer Flowers story, which had broken a few weeks earlier. Gennifer Flowers had tapes of phone conversations with Clinton that she had recorded. She was an attractive blonde, a former TV reporter, nightclub singer and was then a state employee and an acknowledged friend of the governor’s. With all that, she had trouble getting the establishment media to believe her claim that she had a 12-year affair with Clinton.

Bobbie Ann Williams had no tapes or pictures. She was a black hooker who had a drug problem. All she had going for her were lie detector tests that the Globe had arranged for her and her aunt, Lucille Bolton, who was Danny’s guardian at that time. She didn’t have any more chance of getting her story reported by the pro-Clinton establishment media than she had of getting help from the President of the United States, the man she claimed was Danny’s father. Clinton had never acknowledged that he was the father and had never paid any child support.

Wanted: DNA Testing of Bill And Danny

Carl Limbacher, who writes for Chris Ruddy’s web page, NewsMax.com, recently revisited the Danny Williams story. He interviewed Lucille Bolton, who took care of Danny for several years. Danny had lived with her large family in a poor section of Little Rock. It had been said that Danny was in Australia, attending a private school. Lucille Bolton denied that story. She told Limbacher she had a very brief phone conversation with Hillary Clinton about Danny when “Say” McIntosh began distributing his flyers. She said Hillary had asked, “Is it true that he has this illegitimate child?” She gave Bolton the phone number of a security agency she could call to try “to get the publicity to stop.” Bolton next took some of the McIntosh flyers to the governor’s mansion, together with Danny “to get this stuff straightened out.” The troopers refused to let her in.

Bolton said she turned Danny over to Bobbie Ann’s sister, Shirley Howard, in 1994. Limbacher found that both Shirley Howard and Lucille Bolton want Bill Clinton take a paternity test. Limbacher mentioned this on a New York radio talk show, and Ron Kuby, a radical attorney who co-hosts the show, showed some interest in taking the case. When the Jefferson DNA story hit the front pages on Nov. 1, the parallel with President Clinton must have come to the minds of the establishment reporters who were familiar with the Danny Williams rumors. But even when the columns that compared Clinton favorably with Jefferson began to appear they did not bring up the claims of Bobbie Ann Williams. Washington Times editor Wes Pruden, who is from Arkansas, did so in his signed column. But there was no rush to suggest that the tests that had been done to try to resolve the Jefferson dispute should be used to determine if Bill Clinton has a son named Danny.

It is difficult to see why proving or disproving this rumor about our 42nd president should be of less interest to the public and to historians than the resolution of the controversy about the 3rd president. What could explain the failure of The New York Times, The Washington Post, ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and CNN to rush to be the first to commission the DNA tests on Bill Clinton and Danny Williams so they could be the first to either refute or
The announcement that President Clinton had ordered missile strikes on Iraq raised the question in the minds of many people if this was not designed to show the President to be a bold and decisive leader and to delay or divert attention away from the impeachment debate scheduled to begin in the House the next day. This was clearly the view of Scott Ritter, the American who resigned from UNSCOM last August to protest the roadblocks Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was throwing in the way of UNSCOM’s inspections. The New York Post reported on Dec. 17 Ritter’s claim that the U.S. had “prodded inspection teams to return to Iraq last month to provoke a crisis to justify bombing.”

Ritter charged that Richard Butler, the Australian head of UNSCOM, followed U.S. instructions in sending the inspectors to sites where they knew there were no weapons. He said on NBC that this was a scripted scenario. He believed it to be “designed to generate a conflict that would justify a bombing.” Ritter claimed that his sources within the U.S. government had told him when the inspections resumed on November 19 that “the two considerations on the horizon were Ramadan and impeachment.” In announcing the decision to bomb, President Clinton said that the beginning of Ramadan, the month devout Muslims devote to fasting, was the key factor in the timing. The President said the Islamic world would be deeply offended if the action were taken during Ramadan, a view disputed by others who pointed out that Moslem countries themselves did not hesitate to start wars during the holy month. Ritter said, “You have no choice but to interpret this as ‘Wag the Dog.’”

The President, Secretary of Defense William Cohen and other administration spokesmen strongly denied this. Cohen denied that the U.S. had advance knowledge of what Butler’s report to the UN would say, but Ritter told The Washington Times that Cohen was being “disingenuous.” He said, “They worked closely with Richard Butler to make sure the report had no wiggle room.” He charged that the report had been “orchestrated with Richard Butler.” Butler strongly denied that he had taken orders from anyone, but he did not deny that he had been in close touch with Washington while preparing his report.

**Cohen Caught Fibbing**

Sec. Cohen acknowledged that the White House informed the Pentagon on Sunday, Dec. 13th that the air strikes would begin that week. This was before Butler finished his report. Asked about this, Cohen replied, “We were not going to take any action until such time as a report was filed. We knew what it - -” He caught himself. It appears that he almost said, “what it was going to say.” He switched to “what was said” when he remembered that he was not supposed to admit that the White House had advance knowledge of the contents of Butler’s report. Cohen went on to assure reporters that he had no advance knowledge of the contents of Butler’s report.

The New York Times reported that Butler had informed administration officials two days in advance of what he intended to say in his report and that the President “had issued a highly classified order to the Pentagon on Sunday morning that began a 72-hour countdown to the air assault.” That was done without any consultation with Congressional leaders. What was missing in all this was any coherent explanation of what the administration expected to achieve by the air strikes apart from giving the public the impression that Bill Clinton was a strong leader who did not shrink from making tough decisions. Clinton rejected the charge that he was “wagging the dog,” saying, “I do not believe any serious person would believe any President would do such a thing.”

Bill Clinton has a long history of telling the Big Lie, confident that most people can’t believe that any President would lie so outrageously. He tried it last January when he wagged his finger and denied that he had ever had sex with Monica Lewinsky. If it had not been for the semen-stained dress he would probably have gotten away with that whopper. He claimed that the air strikes were ordered to keep Saddam from developing weapons of mass destruction, but they were halted within three hours after the House voted to impeach him. The preliminary damage report said that only 28 of the 97 targets attacked had been destroyed or severely damaged. None of the targets involving weapons of mass destruction was destroyed and only one was severely damaged.

The bombing did accomplish one objective. A New York Times/CBS poll conducted after the impeachment vote, showed Clinton’s approval rating was 72 percent and disapproval of the Republican Party was 58 percent. Both were up six percentage points from the previous week.

**What You Can Do**