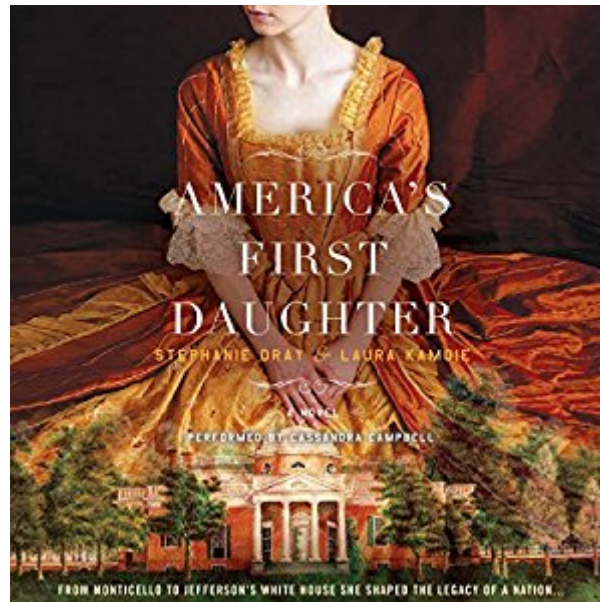




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America's First Daughter: A Novel



Synopsis

In a compelling, richly researched novel that draws from thousands of letters and original sources, best-selling authors Stephanie Dray and Laura Kamoie tell the fascinating, untold story of Thomas Jefferson's eldest daughter, Martha "Patsy" Jefferson Randolph - a woman who kept the secrets of our most enigmatic founding father and shaped an American legacy. From her earliest days, Patsy Jefferson knows that though her father loves his family dearly, his devotion to his country runs deeper still. As Thomas Jefferson's oldest daughter, she becomes his helpmate, protector, and constant companion in the wake of her mother's death, traveling with him when he becomes American minister to France. It is in Paris, at the glittering court and among the first tumultuous days of revolution, that 15-year-old Patsy learns about her father's troubling liaison with Sally Hemings, a slave girl her own age. Meanwhile Patsy has fallen in love - with her father's protégé, William Short, a staunch abolitionist and ambitious diplomat. Torn between love, principles, and the bonds of family, Patsy questions whether she can choose a life as William's wife and still be a devoted daughter. Her choice will follow her in the years to come to Virginia farmland, Monticello, and even the White House. And as scandal, tragedy, and poverty threaten her family, Patsy must decide how much she will sacrifice to protect her father's reputation, in the process defining not just his political legacy but that of the nation he founded.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I know absolutely nothing about Martha "Patsy" Jefferson Randolph. I don't even know that much about her father, President Thomas Jefferson. All I know is that once I finished this engrossing

novel, I want to read more about her and her family. This is one of my favorite historical fiction novels of all time. Patsy Jefferson is the eldest daughter of Thomas Jefferson. Having run from their plantation Monticello to hide from the British in the Revolutionary War, she grows up as not only as the daughter of the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence, she matures as the daughter of the third President of the United States. Growing up, she lost her mother at the age of 10; lived in Paris during her coming out years and experienced the revolutionary fervor there. She comes home and marries a distant cousin, Thomas Randolph. Even though she was constantly pregnant (she ended up giving birth to 11 children), managing her husband's plantations as well as her father's, she ended up being a pivotal part of Thomas Jefferson's life. This is a long novel and if I could, I would have sat in my chair and read for hours. This story simply pulled you into Patsy's life, turmoil, world ... it gives a personal flair to a woman I have never heard of. It does touch upon the sticky issues of slavery, Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemmings and Patsy's own relationship with Sally as well as with other people. It is a reminder for those of us who like to think in terms of history being black and white, that there are a lot more issues that surround the times and nothing is ever so easy as we'd like to believe. The authors have navigated through some of the thorny issues with a fine touch by bringing a personal touch to it. The only issue I have with this book is that it does not cover her later years as much as I had hoped for. However, if there are books written about her children, I will definitely seek them out. I know this is a novel, but I feel as if this would be a good starting point in getting to know the history of our forefathers, as much as to encourage the interest in our leading ladies. These 2 authors have managed to bring a woman who has been buried under the dusty pages of history to life. And that is my favorite way to spend time ... reading about the ones who have lived before us. It is inspiring to read about people and be reminded that too, they were once flesh and blood, and survived to be remembered in history as to shape our country's path.

I knew a bit about Thomas Jefferson's family, including his daughter Patsy, but this well-researched novel brought her to life. The eldest of three daughters, Patsy was the one who stood by his side through his long career in public service, culminating in the presidency in the early 1800s. Patsy's mother, who died when her eldest was 10, made her promise to always take care of her father, and Patsy did, sometimes to her detriment. The novel starts with Patsy as a child as her family flees Monticello as British troops approach in the waning days of the Revolutionary War. It follows her to Paris not long after, where she accompanies her father, who is the fledgling nation's representative in France. Patsy grows up quickly amid the decadent French court and the stirrings of revolution. She finds, and then loses, her first love. After her return to Virginia, she marries a member of the

illustrious Randolph family, whose members aren't known for their kindness or integrity. Through it all, she is there for her father as he travels back and forth from Washington City -- later D.C. -- serving a variety of roles before running for president and serving two terms. Woven through the narrative is Jefferson's relationship with the beautiful slave Sally Hemings, believed to be the half-sister of Jefferson's late wife and bearing a strong resemblance to her. Over the years, Sally bears him several children. Their attachment is an open secret that results in scandal brewed by Jefferson's political opponents. This is a long book -- almost 600 pages -- but I raced through it. The writing is straightforward and Patsy's voice is strong. She was a witness to, and sometimes a participant in, the history of the nation, but that didn't protect her from tragedy. Life in the early United States was hard, and medical care was rudimentary. The problems of Jefferson's descendants are not glossed over here. Still, it's a fascinating story -- stirring events are told in a first-person account that makes it seem like you are sitting in front of Patsy, hearing her tell her life story. I highly recommend this book.

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