

Gayle Jessup White

American history is in Gayle Jessup White's blood. A direct descendant of both Thomas Jefferson and those enslaved at his famous Monticello estate, her story is a real-life version of *Roots* – a 40-year struggle to prove that her family's belief about its links to the author of the Declaration of Independence were true. Along the way, she unearthed not only a fascinating family saga, but sharp and searing insights into America's conflicted past and the unsettled future.

She recounts her journey in her critically acclaimed book, *Reclamation: Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson, and a Descendant's Search for Her Family's Lasting Legacy*, published by Amisted, an imprint of HarperCollins - hailed by best-selling author Bakari Sellers as "a quintessential American story that should be required reading for anyone who doesn't understand the true contributions of African-Americans to this nation."

The narrative begins in Washington, DC, where Gayle grew up in a comfortable Black middle-class neighborhood, shielded from racial issues, and continued through her career as an award-winning television reporter and communications specialist. Throughout it all, she was dogged by something she overheard during a family conversation when she was 13 years old – that her family could trace its roots to Jefferson. But the family lore was oral history passed down from an elderly relative who could not read or write. Without historical documents and other evidence, for decades validating that lore seemed impossible.

It was not until Gayle made connections at Monticello that, with the help of a famous historian and DNA, she was able to prove that the family legend was not only true. It was also more inspiring than she had ever hoped.

Today, Gayle works at Monticello, as the Thomas Jefferson Foundation's first public relations & community engagement officer – the first descendant of Jefferson and the families he enslaved to work for the Foundation. Her position provides her unique

opportunities to share her *American* story —and her hope that lessons learned from our past can guide us in the future—in evocative presentations and in a forthcoming book about her mother’s side of her family.

Gayle earned a B.A. from Howard University’s School of Communications and Master of Science from Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism. She and her husband, award winning journalist Jack White Jr. have a blended family of five children and seven grandchildren.