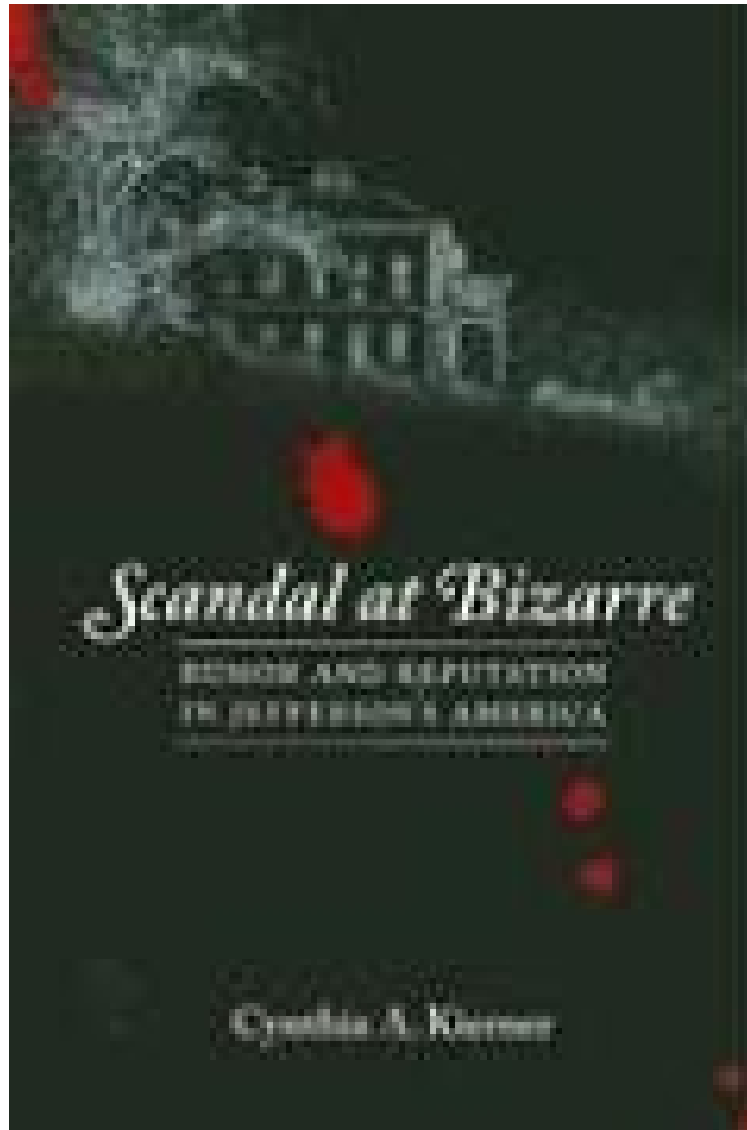


(Mobile book) Scandal at Bizarre: Rumor and Reputation in Jefferson's America

Scandal at Bizarre: Rumor and Reputation in Jefferson's America

Cynthia A. Kierner

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Cynthia A. Kierner : Scandal at Bizarre: Rumor and Reputation in Jefferson's America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Scandal at Bizarre: Rumor and Reputation in Jefferson's America:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A watershead moment.....By Robert C. Hufford.....in Virginia history. In Colonial times, the name Randolph meant something in Virginia. In fact, the Randolph family, in its various branches, were pretty much a law unto themselves, able to do anything, including murder, with impunity. Fortunately, most of them, like Speaker Peyton Randolph, were decent people, who provided sound leadership. The

family has produced some of THE names in American history; Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, Robert E. Lee.....Alas, much of the glory slowly departed after Independence....tobacco depleted the soil...wealth disappeared...power waned....the name was all some of them had left....On the morning of October 1, 1792, Richard Randolph travelled from his estate, "Bizarre" to "Glentivar", the estate of his cousins the Harrisons. He was accompanied by his wife Judith, and his wife's sister, Ann Cary "Nancy" Randolph. The girls were the sisters of Jefferson's son-in-law, Thomas Mann Randolph, jr. [Jefferson's only connection...I'll return to that]. That night, something [or, I should say, SOMETHING] happened, and Virginia was never the same. Sometime during the night, Nancy screamed with abdominal pain, footsteps were heard on the stairs, and, the next morning, the Harrison slaves started telling of finding a dead white baby in the woodpile, though no body was ever produced. Rumors had already circulated that Richard was overly affectionate towards Nancy, though Nancy was also said to be attached to Richard's brother, by then deceased.....In the aftermath, Richard was accused of impregnating Nancy, helping her abort, and killing the baby. Worse, in the culture of the time, he was accused of not providing proper family leadership and protection. Nancy was accused of bring a "loose woman" [...], and forfeiting her right to protection. Richard was arrested, and, in April 1793, tried for murder. Somehow, he managed to hire a "dream team" defense of Patrick Henry, John Marshall, and Alexander Campbell, and got off. Richard was free, but with a ruined reputation; he was already broke. In 1796, he died. Years later, Nancy stated that she had been pregnant by Theo, and miscarried.Nancy stayed on at Bizarre until 1805, in what atmosphere we can only imagine. Richard's surviving brother, John Randolph of Roanoke, did all he could to make her life hell. She tried to live in Richmond, but was shunned by her own extended family....she moved to New York, and found redemption in the person of Gouverneur Morris, whom she married in 1809, and bore one son. When Morris died in 1816, Nancy was left rich, but under attack from the Morris family who wanted to dispute paternity of the child and get at the money. They were aided by John Randolph, who made sure Nancy's reputation followed her. But Nancy fended off all challenges, was as fine a mother as she had been wife, and even helped out some of the financially poor Randolphs who tried to ruin her.This book is a parable of family ruin, wrapped around a still-debated legal case, with a counterpoint of personal fall and rise. The reasons for the Randolph decline are many. Dr. Kierner has written a fine story, a look at one family in a larger society. I give five stars, though the subtitle perplexes me. I get the impression, very wrong though it may be, that Dr. Kierner doesn't like Mr. Jefferson [I always use present tense in speaking of Mr. Jefferson], and is trying to impute guilt by association. Jefferson has NOTHING to do with this story, except an indirect one thru his blockhead son-in-law. Still, a good yarn, well organized, well told...that's five stars.1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy george spainWell written. A story that holds your attention.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Virginia history at its best!By Richard S. Dixon Jr.This is a great history of a small event, which has reverberations into the greater world of American history. It reminds me much of the Peggy O'Neill scandal of the 1830s, which destroyed John C. Calhoun's chances for the presidency and elevated the Old Magician, Martin van Buren. Much like that scandal almost forty years later, the scandal at Bizarre is a delight of human failure, success and perseverance. Anyone interested in Virginia history of the Federal period will delight in the details of this book.Kierner has put together a fascinating tale; the pacing is right and the focus is also right on the money. The misadventures of Nancy Randolph read like some Bronte novel; all the more interesting is this tale because it is true! The families involved are some of the most prominent in Virginia (even still!); the events easily imaginable. One ends up sympathizing with almost everyone connected with this story (except perhaps Patrick Henry, who takes his five hundred Pound fee and creeps back to Red Hill in pretty miserable fashion). I even felt sorry for poor Richard: dead at 26 of mysterious causes. And poor Judith, eeking out a miserable existence in rented rooms in Farmville and Richmond: truly, the paths of Glory lead but to the Grave! Read it and weep.

In the early 1790s Richard Randolph was accused of fathering a child by his sister-in-law, Nancy, and murdering the baby shortly after its birth. Rumors about the incident, which occurred during a visit to the plantation of close family friends, spread like wildfire. Randolph found himself on trial for the crime largely because of the public outrage fueled by these rumors. The rest of the household suffered too, and only Nancy, who later married the esteemed New York statesman Gouverneur Morris, would find any degree of happiness. A tale of family passion, betrayal, and deception, Scandal at Bizarre is a fascinating historical portrait of the social and political realities of a world long vanished.

From Publishers WeeklyHere's a scholarly book that artfully relates a riveting tale with lasting historical repercussions and significance. Readers will be drawn by the story of a strong woman who may have been wronged; the great Randolph family of Virginia torn asunder; the implication of members of Thomas Jefferson's circle; slaves' whispers fanning the flames of scandal; and eventual reconciliation of sorts. Although "bizarre" characterizes the story itself, it was in fact the name of the Virginia plantation of Richard and Judith Randolph. Upon their visit to a neighboring plantation in 1792, something went seriously wrong, something that remains a mystery to this daywas it a miscarriage resulting from premarital or extramarital sex? Or was it infanticide? Kierner, who teaches early American and women's history at UNC-Charlotte, reports with a colorist's deft touch and a fiction writer's delight while remaining

faithful to scholarly conventions and trends. In trying to draw the last drop of meaning from her tale, Kierner sometimes strains, but she never lets her wide learning and skilled professionalism intrude on her tale's momentum. This account analyzes part of the reality of Jefferson's Virginia in the nation's early years. Kierner makes us look at the world of the founders in all its messy complexity and humanity. Bw illus., maps. (Jan.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist A scandal involving the Randolph clan of Virginia draws the interest of women's historian Kierner; it arose from a 1792 incident and a murder trial the following year. Since a popular biography of the scandal's central figure, Nancy Randolph, was written in 2000 (*Unwise Passions*, by Alan Pell Crawford), Kierner widens her ambit to include the social milieu, describing her treatment as "microhistory." Bringing to bear the declining fortunes of the Randolph family, the function of gossip in a slaveholding society, and the limited options of women at the time, Kierner quickly dispenses with the murky facts of the 1792 incident. Was the unmarried Nancy pregnant? Did she commit infanticide? Did her brother-in-law Richard commit murder? Kierner thinks the evidence is inconclusive, as did a court that acquitted Richard of murder. But the stigma of the fallen woman followed Nancy throughout her life, disrupting even her eventual marriage to founding father Gouverneur Morris. Perceptively observing the social history of the early republic, Kierner astutely interprets its influences on one woman's life. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "Here's a scholarly book that artfully relates a riveting tale with lasting historical repercussions and significance. Readers will be drawn by the story of a strong woman who may have been wronged; the great Randolph family of Virginia torn asunder; the implication of members of Thomas Jefferson's circle; slaves' whispers fanning the flames of scandal; and eventual reconciliation of sorts.... [Kierner] reports with a colorist's deft touch and a fiction writer's delight while remaining faithful to scholarly conventions and trends.... This account analyzes part of the reality of Jefferson's Virginia in the nation's early years. Kierner makes us look at the world of the founders in all its messy complexity and humanity." Publishers Weekly "Screams in the dark... cries in the night... and footsteps on the stair. The story of the scandal at Bizarre is a cold case more compelling than any fiction. In the hands of a serious historian and talented writer, the tale of an American family caught in a maelstrom of gossip becomes a window on the lost world of the Virginia founders. Scandal at Bizarre is that rare historical book a page-turner!" Catherine Allgor, Associate Professor of History, University of California at Riverside, author of *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* "Beginning with the events of one distraught night in 1792, Cynthia Kierner uncovers a disturbing part of Thomas Jefferson's Virginia. Weaving subtle analysis throughout a taut narrative, this book reveals a complex world of sex, honor, slavery, law, public opinion, and power we have only glimpsed before." Edward L. Ayers, author of *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863*, winner of the Bancroft Prize "Using overall analysis and case study, Kierner... [makes a] striking contribution not only to the historiography of the period of the early Republic in which [her] narrative occur[s] but also to scholars understanding of the Revolution that [she] set[s] powerfully in perspective." Rhys Isaac, William and Mary Quarterly (Rhys Isaac William and Mary Quarterly)