

We Hold These Truths
A Documentary About Family, Science, and the American Story
Confidential

LOGLINE

When a 95-year-old PhD-holding descendant of Sally Hemings and a patrician descendant of Thomas Jefferson form an unexpected friendship, their bond sparks a patriotic and profoundly healing search for truth. Guided by Jefferson’s own injunction — *“Be not afraid to follow the truth wherever it may lead”* — they attempt to illuminate a founding-era mystery whose resolution could reshape how Americans understand Jefferson, slavery, and the ideals that built the United States.

SUMMARY

America is living through an epoch of discord. Yet in this moment of division, two elders both full of faith—one a descendant of Sally Hemings, the other of Thomas Jefferson—have chosen to walk hand-in-hand toward a truth that has eluded America for more than two centuries.

Their journey unfolds at the crossroads of **science and history**, in a story that contains all the elements of a national mystery: unanswered questions, generations of silence, contested narratives, and the possibility of evidence of sex, paternity and scandal literally unearthed from tombs as DNA, God’s fingerprints.

We Hold These Truths places viewers inside a **historic DNA investigation** conducted with the support of **Nobel Prize–winning laboratories**, the same scientific institutions responsible for breakthroughs that have solved cold cases, decoded the human genome, and rewritten what we know about ancestry and identity.

This study is unprecedented: it spans multiple family lines, several centuries, and relies on forensic techniques never before applied to a founding-era American mystery.

At the center of the story lies a driving question: **Who fathered the children of Sally Hemings?**

And what does the answer mean for the American story itself?

Historians have concluded Jefferson’s guilt. Of course the Jefferson family objects. But fascinatingly, so do many members of the Hemings Family. Historians regularly cite a 1998 DNA study they say was “conclusive”. Yet, scientists then and now say that this particular study was far from certain. It was anything but. And since science has advanced tremendously since then, members of the Hemings family seek the complete truth along with the Jeffersons, whatever that truth may be.

To pursue truth, the film follows a path filled with suspense, complexity, and revelation:

- **DNA samples crossing continents to reach elite genetics labs**
- **The potential exhumation of long-buried ancestors**
- **Handwritten documents reinterpreted through fresh scientific light**
- **Hair strands analyzed with cutting-edge methods that solved the Beethoven mystery**
- **Family lines once thought “broken” reunited through molecular evidence**
- **Moments where 200 years of uncertainty hang in the balance of a single genetic marker**

As the investigation deepens, the narrative becomes a tapestry of twists and emotional turning points—letters lost to time, descendants meeting for the first time, forgotten graves rediscovered, and findings that challenge the assumptions of scholars and families alike.

But at its heart, the film is profoundly human.

Two elders—each carrying the weight of inherited stories—choose friendship over fear. Their conversations are tender, raw, and patriotic in the truest sense. They enact Jefferson’s own charge: **“Be not afraid to follow the truth wherever it may lead.”**

This is not just a documentary. It is a **cinematic quest**. A **scientific thriller**. A **healing journey through America’s past**.

And ultimately, it offers a truth that may reshape not only the Jefferson–Hemings story, but the story of the nation forged in the Declaration’s immortal words.

It is an American renewal — a living testament to the Founders’ belief that we must “appeal to the better angels of our nature” (Lincoln) and face our past with candor and courage.

WHY THIS FILM MUST BE MADE

Because the Founders understood something we have nearly forgotten: **that self-government requires civic friendship**. Jefferson wrote that our duty was to follow the truth “wherever it may lead,” even when it leads through uncomfortable terrain.

Today, in a fractured landscape where Americans struggle even to speak across a table, these two families have chosen a path worthy of the Founders’ hopes for the republic — a path of humility, fellowship, and unflinching inquiry.

This film must be made because the **Declaration of Independence** — the single most transformative political document in human history — is the heart of American exceptionalism.

It offered the world a new moral vocabulary: *“All men are created equal.”*

The thirteen words that open the Declaration shook empires. They toppled centuries of hierarchy. They inspired every democratic movement that followed. But if the author of those words remains misunderstood, distorted, or condemned without evidence, then America's story becomes untellable.

To preserve the integrity of the Declaration, we must examine Jefferson honestly — rigorously — and, where facts allow, we must be willing to *“judge not by the rumors of others, but by the facts before us.”* (Jefferson)

What if in fact, Jefferson is not guilty? Will it open space for people to realize that Abraham Lincoln copied Jefferson's writings nearly verbatim to craft the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery? Will people be open to studying Jefferson's failed bills to outlaw slavery in the 1780s? Will Americans be accepting that Jefferson's first draft of the Declaration was an anti-slavery manifesto? Our country was founded on freedom — for everyone. With this recognition and using Jefferson himself, can our country finally heal from its original sin?

Two fearless seekers — one from Jefferson's line, one from Hemings' — are fulfilling the Founders' charge to future generations: to seek truth, to heal division, and to strengthen the republic not with slogans but with courage.

This story is not merely historical. It is medicinal. It is the work the Founders hoped we would do.

WHY ME (SANJAY RAWAL)

In *Food Chains*, my team and I transformed an obscure labor crisis into a national conversation, earning theatrical distribution and multiple major streaming deals. In *3100: Run and Become*, we took an unfathomable 3,100-mile race and made it mystical and universal. In *Gather*, we turned centuries of Indigenous trauma and resilience into a Netflix-acquired story that touched millions.

My life as a filmmaker has been dedicated to the belief — shared by the Founders — that America is an unfinished project, and that each generation must recommit itself to its guiding creed.

I hold the Declaration of Independence as one of humanity's greatest moral achievements. Jefferson called it “an expression of the American mind,” and he was right: it is the document that gave this nation its soul.

I believe those words changed the world. I believe they can still change us. And I believe that unless we clarify — and where evidence warrants, partially or fully exonerate — the man who wrote them, America will lose the narrative that binds its people together.

This project is not an academic exercise for me. It is a patriotic calling that I've channeled from my youth as an Eagle Scout to a professional career that included stints working with the DoD and dozens of nonprofits.

My dedication to the future of this country — to its ideals, its stories, its healing — is total. I have spent four years protecting this film because I believe the truth revealed here can strengthen America's civic fabric at a moment when it is fraying.

Jefferson once wrote: *"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom."* This film is my attempt to honor that first chapter.

THE FUNDING IMPERATIVE

I've kept this entire project under wraps — from the public, from the press, even from traditional funders — for one simple reason: **science is not politics-proof**. The moment this story leaks, the study at its heart risks becoming a partisan bonfire. We refused to let that happen. We refused to let truth be derailed before it was even discovered. So I protected the process the only way I could: **I self-funded everything**. For four years. Quietly. Carefully. At personal cost (\$750k). But I've reached the end of what I can do alone.

To bring this film into the world without compromising its integrity — without rushing the science, without inviting political interference, without turning this into another culture-war football —

We require: **\$150,000 at minimum (equity or grants). We could absorb an additional \$100,000 in non-recoupable family-foundation support if it were available.**

This is not merely a funding request. It is an invitation to participate in the Founders' unfinished work — to help safeguard a moment of truth, reconciliation, and American renewal.

COMPS

Our team is **committed** to distribution. My (Sanjay's) last film GATHER was released in the throes of the pandemic but netted low seven figures in community screening revenue before being acquired by Netflix, which ran the film from 2021 til Oct 31 2025.

The team behind TURNING POINT USA's social media has launched Sanjay's new nonpartisan TikTok channel with provocative, challenging content about American History.

THE TEASER — AND THE MOMENT WE'RE IN

We've developed this film quietly to avoid any outside pressure on the science at the center of the story. At this point, the project is well advanced: we've edited approximately **80 minutes** of

the film, and we've **focus-grouped the cut with both Black and white audiences**, who responded positively and offered helpful insights that have already been incorporated.

The structure is solid. The narrative is clear. The film is close to completion.

The remaining element is the release of the independent DNA study that forms the final chapter of the story. Once that study is published, we will be ready to complete the remaining scenes and move directly into final post-production.

To expedite that study, we have also found two graves and have active petitions to partially disinter remains. One is a son of Jefferson's brother, Randolph. We have a petition in Nashville right now. The other is the son of Sally's eldest son, Madison Hemings. A petition is being prepared now with Hemings family members as leads.

In short: the film is largely built, it has been tested with audiences, and it now needs support to finish responsibly and on schedule.

Teaser:

<https://illumine.vids.io/videos/aa9bdcb11a1febcc20/we-hold-these-truths-jan-2026-teaser>

Password: 2026

TEAM

Sanjay Rawal – Director. Known for films about marginalized populations and their work to dismantle the legacy of colonization: Food Chains (Netflix), Gather (Netflix), 3100 Run and Become (Amazon Prime)

Alexander Meillier – Editor. Alex rose to prominence in the 2000s as one of Michael Moore's editors and directed his first feature in 2014 ALIAS RUBY BLADE – about the first First Lady of East Timor. Alex edited GATHER and 3100 Run and Become.

Sean Kirby – DP. Sean has had numerous films at Sundance, Cannes, Berlin and the New York Film Festival.