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## Poem in Which I Inhabit a Founding Father

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# poem in which i inhabit a founding father

Ashley Jones

I live in Jefferson County, Alabama.<sup>1</sup>  
I don't know if Thomas Jefferson ever visited Alabama,  
if he ever stepped one presidential foot into this county,  
one thousand one hundred twenty-four square miles  
named for him—that makes one hundred eighty-seven square miles

for each of the six children he made with Sally Hemings,  
so much more than forty acres and a mule  
but how many miles does it take to forget your father  
and his lecherous grip, how many miles  
to remember him as the history books do?

One hundred eighty-seven square miles, perhaps the distance  
it takes to make a Black child forget his mother,  
miles enough to will him whiter, whiter, white—

I live in Jefferson County, Alabama.

Here, we've covered up a Confederate statue right across the street from City Hall and the  
Good Governor says we don't have the right to free speech if it's against the Heart of Dixie  
by which I mean the Daughters of the Confederacy by which I mean women of a movement  
that is still moving don't get it twisted reader the South did rise again—and it was called  
American Greed and it was called American Tradition and it was called the status quo—

Here, we covered up a Confederate statue and the Good  
Governor ordered it undressed—what is intimacy, after all,  
without nakedness,

(and we know that the State just wants to know us all  
the way, past the bone and even into the womb)

what is nakedness but an act of law?  
The Good Governor ordered it undressed  
and she ordered a man to death with the same urgency.  
A statute, an idea, a confederacy, a history of blood  
must have room to breathe, but a man?  
An innocent man? A Black man?  
I live in Jefferson County, Alabama,  
and I know the history of that name.  
I know the ghosts that bubble from its teeth,  
the rot beneath the bone.

**“Do you want to  
know who you are?  
Don't ask . Act!  
Action will delineate  
and define you.”**

– Thomas Jefferson

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Jefferson County, Alabama was established in 1819, the same year Alabama became a part of the United States of America, just seven years before Jefferson died, just seven years before Sally Hemings, Jefferson's slave and mother of six of his children, was freed.