



# American Conversation

## Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

*February 5, 2009*

Former Archivist of the United States Allen Weinstein and Dr. Lonnie Bunch, Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, welcomed Harvard professor and renowned author Henry Louis Gates, Jr., to discuss African American genealogy. While researching his own family history, Professor Gates discovered the fascinating histories of other prominent African Americans, resulting in his new book, *In Search of Our Roots: How 19 Extraordinary African Americans Reclaimed Their Past*. A book signing followed the program.

**MARVIN PINKERT:** It's my pleasure this evening to introduce the two co-moderators for our program--Dr. Lonnie Bunch is the Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African-American History and Culture. I'm sure that most of you read that the new museum reached another milestone this week, this last week, as finalists were selected in the competition for new architects for the building. We're all incredibly excited to be just a few years away from this great addition to the nation's public history landscape. Tonight is one of several events we're proud to co-sponsor with the new museum. Lonnie's biography is detailed in the program you received, but just a couple of highlights--prior to coming back to D.C., Lonnie served as director of the Chicago Historical Society. His much acclaimed innovations there, including the exhibit "Teen Chicago," have been the talk of the museum field for many years. Lonnie was even earlier the Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs at the National Museum of American History. And, Lonnie, I noticed that when the museum reopened this November they updated the exhibit American Presidency that you curated. It's amazing how one photograph can improve an exhibit.

[Laughter and applause]

Our other moderator this evening is Professor Allen Weinstein, who four years ago this month took the oath as the ninth Archivist of the United States. There is a lot that I could say here, but I'm going to follow his principle--the four most dangerous words in the English language are "I will be brief." Professor Weinstein was a transformational leader of the National Archives. He took important steps to prepare this organization for the digital



age. He was a firm proponent of our role in education and a fierce defender of the people's access to records at a time when such defense was not always met with universal applause across the government.

Germane to this evening, Professor Weinstein invented American Conversations. In his very first talk with me, he raised the idea of creating a forum where some of the most brilliant minds in the nation would have a chance to expound on issues, both public and private, that shaped their lives and informed their work. As we start tonight's program, I'd like you to join me in thanking Professor Weinstein for the more than two dozen evenings where he has made our guests feel at home in their National Archives.

[Applause]

**LONNIE BUNCH:** I don't know about you, but I'm ready to just watch the whole special.

[Laughter]

**HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR:** Thank you. Thanks a lot.

[Applause]

**ALLEN WEINSTEIN:** Well, we're a democracy, let's take a vote. All in favor. Where do you start? I think we start by saying good evening.

**AUDIENCE:** Good evening.

**WEINSTEIN:** I can't hear you. Good evening.

**AUDIENCE:** Good evening.

**WEINSTEIN:** A little louder.

**AUDIENCE:** Good evening.

**GATES:** He learned that from black people.

**BUNCH:** That's right.

[Laughter]

I've been trying to teach him for years.

**WEINSTEIN:** I've got another one for you, but I'll wait a while.



[Laughter]

Don't spoil this material. Uh, I want to thank the people who have been involved in this whole series. Marvin especially, and Susan, if she's here, and those of you who had any role in this, would you mind standing up so we can thank you properly? Please.

[Applause]

Thank you. Ok, let's jump in. I've got a few things to say later, but I'll wait with that. Henry Louis Skip Gates, Jr.

**GATES:** Yes, sir.

**WEINSTEIN:** Present?

**GATES:** Present.

**WEINSTEIN:** Ok. We both have our canes, but the [Indistinct] are visible. I just wouldn't mess around with either one of us. Lonnie's another story, but I'll leave it up to you. Skip had a wonderful comment that you made in the interview you gave before doing your--one of your lectures last year. And it ran--if I can find it... Like this, "I liken the role of the scholar of African-American studies today to a Talmudic scholar." Jews are getting into this thing all over the place. "Someone whose job it is to preserve the tradition, to resurrect the texts, and key events of the past, and to explicate them." It was an interview with NEH Director Bruce Cole at your Jefferson lecture.

**GATES:** Yes.

**WEINSTEIN:** What do you mean to say?

**GATES:** What did I what?

**WEINSTEIN:** What did you mean to say?

**GATES:** What did I mean to say? I think that--

**WEINSTEIN:** Then we'll get Lonnie into this after that.

**GATES:** For me, I was raised to be a doctor. My brother--I have one brother, no sisters, Dr. Paul Gates, went to dental school. He's Chief of Dentistry. He's an oral surgeon at Bronx Lebanon Hospital. But my mama died in 1987--God rest her soul--wanted two doctors. And so I was pre-med at Yale, and I even took a year off. Yale had a program called Five-Year B.A. In those days you were rewarded for taking an extra year instead of



one less year. And my family--I'm from Piedmont, West Virginia, which is just up the river, you know, on the Potomac near Cumberland, right on the Maryland-West Virginia border.

And all my family, on all sides, has lived in the Potomac valley for a couple of hundred years, as we found out from the genealogist who did my genealogy for "African-American Lives." And the most sacred thing you could do was to be a doctor. So I was going to be a doctor, and that was just the way it was. And I'm very good--I was very good in the sciences and my quantitative scores on the SAT's were 50 points higher than my verbal scores. It was just weird. But when I got to Yale each semester I took a course in Black Studies, and I was intrigued. And I went to Yale in 1969--Black Studies came of--it was born in San Francisco State in '68, but Yale and Harvard and everywhere else in 1969, really.

So I was just intrigued by it. And everything black I read just stuck to me like glue. I could just--I had a really good memory for all the texts that I read by black people or about black people. I was really hungry for it.

And it started when I was in high school reading Lerone Bennett's history columns in "Ebony" magazine. Piedmont, West Virginia is not exactly the font of African-American culture, you know what I mean. So our lifeline to black people was "Jet" magazine in the barber shop--my mother wouldn't allow that because it had the centerfold—and "Ebony" magazine at home. And when I got to Yale, Afro-Am was under siege from the beginning.

In the first place, there was a great man, Roy Brice, who is a very good friend to this day, but he wasn't tenured. And it was clear that Afro-Am did not have the same stature as the English department or the Chemistry department, and I thought that was a terrible thing because I thought, as naïve as I was, young as I was, I thought that our tradition was just as splendid as any other tradition. And so I just took a course each semester, each semester. And gradually these two sets of interests came together. I was lucky enough to get a fellowship to go to the University of Cambridge, a Mellon fellowship. And, in fact, the day I got a Mellon fellowship--when I was growing up in the fifties--my cousin Arnold's here--he was a great athlete. When my cousins wanted to be--not Arnold--but my cousin Greg, my cousin Jerry--wanted to be Hank Aaron or Willie Mays, I wanted to be a Rhodes scholar. And because of my mother I wanted to go to Harvard or Yale because smart people went there, and I wanted to go to Oxford or Cambridge. So at the beginning of my senior year--our senior year--I got--I applied for all of these fellowships. I applied for a Rhodes, and Marshall and a Fulbright.

And I didn't get any of these fellowships. And I was black from West Virginia, I was junior year Phi Beta, and I was scholar of the house, and I was going to graduate summa cum laude. You know, I knew I was going to get--just for affirmative action distribution.

**BUNCH:** Something, right.



[Laughter]

**GATES:** So one of my best friends in the world is Linda Darling Hammond who is sitting right there, so I went to Linda and I said--we were undergraduates in Yale together--So I said, "Linda, I'm not getting these fellowships." and I didn't have any other career plans because I knew I was going to go to Oxford or Cambridge. And she said, "You know, maybe you're not being yourself. Maybe you're being artificial."

And she was absolutely right and I was embarrassed. I was sort of making up a persona that I thought they wanted me to be. So I went to my last interview, the Mellon fellowship, and I got it. So I ran-- I couldn't believe it. It was one of the happiest days of my--other than the day that my two daughters were born, it was the happiest day of my life.

So I ran back to Calhoun College at Yale. You know, at Yale they charge so much they could change the names of the dorms, right, the Colleges. Harvard calls them Houses, Yale calls them Colleges. So I ran back and I called Piedmont, West Virginia and my dad answered the phone. Now my father is 95-- my father is the funniest man I have ever met. My father makes Redd Foxx look like an undertaker.

[Laughter]

And I'll tell you how funny he is. Daddy picked up the phone and I said, "Daddy, put Mama on the phone." I say, "You'll never believe it." Mama got on the phone-- remember, in those days you didn't have two phones, you had a phone and an extension phone. Remember? I don't know what wit of that, but we had an extension phone. So Mama's upstairs on the extension phone and I said, "Mama, Daddy, you'll never believe it. I'm the first Afro-American--"

Remember, this is February, 1973. We were Afro-Americans then.

"The first Afro-American to get a Mellon fellowship. I'm going to Cambridge." The first Afro-American to get this fellow. And my daddy without missing a beat said, "You the first negro to get this Mellon fellowship?" and I said, "Yeah, Daddy." He said, "Huh. They ought to call it the Watermelon fellowship."

[Laughter]

So...So, armed with my Watermelon fellowship, I went off to Cambridge, and there I met two people who changed my life and now I can answer your question directly.

**WEINSTEIN:** Briefly but directly.



**GATES:** Briefly, yes, sir. I realized--I met Wally Shoyinka, who was this bushy-headed African, who was in exile from Nigeria. The English department would not even give him an appointment because they said African literature was not real literature. So I studied with him in the Socio-Anthropology department, and I met a young African prince whose uncle was the Asanti Hini, the king of the Asanti--and his name was Kwami Anthony Apia. And one is the godfather of my older daughter, and the other is the godfather of my younger daughter, and they're my best friends.

They both looked at me and said, "Why the hell do you want to be a doctor when you could be an academic? And you can preserve and explicate the traditions of persons of African descent through literature."

And so I realized all that time that I didn't want to be a doctor, and that my avocation should be my vocation, and that I could perhaps, if I were lucky, make a contribution to institutionalizing African-American studies the right way. You know, with new tools, and new resources, and new credentials, and that's the job that God or fate gave me.

**WEINSTEIN:** You're absolutely correct. It's Talmudic.

**GATES:** It's Talmudic. I could have just said that, I guess.

**WEINSTEIN:** Lonnie, I want to ask you how you became involved in this whole--in the field, in the study, and the rest. I want to give you, if not equal time, at least close to equal time. But I also have to inject a personal note here. Just about the same time that you were getting your Watermelon scholarship, the first edition of a reader collection called "American Negro Slavery" was coming out.

**GATES:** Oh, yes.

**WEINSTEIN:** Edited by a young fellow named Weinstein who read a lot of stuff. And it was used as a great trot by all the graduate students because the bibliography was there and you could write your senior thesis on it. The Professor--it was Edward Gonswit, so it was a useful device.

**GATES:** Right.

**WEINSTEIN:** It went through four editions and then I stopped doing it for a very simple reason--it became a field. People were actually doing scholarship in it, amazing scholarship. Remember how quickly it transformed.

**GATES:** John Blasingame, 1972, "Slave Community," for example.

**WEINSTEIN:** And a lot of other things.



**GATES:** Yeah.

**WEINSTEIN:** Lonnie?

**BUNCH:** Well, I mean, one of the things I wanted to say was as a historian I know that there are a few people in each generation that transform the field, and you're one of those people. It means so much to us the way you have not only imbued our field with scholarship, but you also recognized how important it is that there's a public dimension of this. And in some ways I'd really love for you to talk a little about what you learned as you went through not only your own genealogy, but helping all these other folks find their past.

What did you learn from that? How does that change the way you think about the work you do?

**GATES:** Two ways. First of all, thank you, thank you very much. It's very kind. I mean, my mentor, when I came back from Cambridge, I was working with Charles Davis, who was the first master of Calvin--black man--Tony Davis--Anthony Davis' father. And John Blasingame, who wrote the "Slave Community," the first black historian to write a history of slavery from the point of view of the slave. And these guys loved me and I loved them. And they kept saying, "You know, you're going to be chair of Afro-Am one day." And they didn't even like each other that much. But I took from Charles Davis--Charles Davis would put on white bucks to watch the Kentucky Derby.

[Laughter]

And John Blas--and he was from the big house--and Blasingame was from the field, he was from social circle. He used to pick cotton when he was a kid. One was tall and dark, one was short and light-complected. They couldn't stand each other. I was their point of mediation. And I realized if I could take half of Charles Davis and half of Blasingame, I might be a decent chair, which is what I tried to do.

The first thing I learned of doing the genealogy series--and, by the way, I got this idea in the middle of the night. I got up to go to the bathroom. I mean, I don't want to offend anybody, but I did. And I'm standing there in the bathroom, and it's like a bolt of lightning that I could do perhaps--if I could persuade eight prominent African-Americans.

Nobody--it costs \$6 million to do a four-hour PBS series. So you needed to have some prominent people to get that money. And I figured that if I could persuade eight prominent African-Americans, I could do their genealogy back to slavery. And then when the paper trail ended, I would do their DNA.

Now I've been obsessed with my family tree since the day Edward St. Lawrence Gates died--since the day he was buried. That's my grandfather, my father's father, in June—



early June of 1960. And that's the day my father showed us that my grandfather had a treasure trove of scrapbooks and he clipped obituaries and accidents and articles about the negro. The first negro this, the first--and he looked like a white man, looked like a ghost. We used to call him Casper behind his back, he was so white.

**BUNCH:** But if he caught you, you were in trouble.

**GATES:** Yeah, absolutely. So I had been obsessed with my own family tree, but I could only get back to my great grandmother--great, great grandmother, Jane Gates, who was a slave.

But we knew the man who fathered her children was a white man, and we thought he was an Irishman named Samuel Brady. And then Rick Kittles, who's a famous geneticist, black man who was at Howard, in the year 2000 contacted me and said he wanted to do my DNA, he was asking different public African-Americans if he could do their DNA. But most of them were saying no because he had to take--extract your blood with a needle and they didn't want him to take it. So he came up--I was at Harvard--and he came up. I could see why--Rick's a brilliant geneticist, but he is not a brilliant extractor of blood. That brother's like excavating, you know, like digging for mine. I said, "Damn, this Kunta Kinte stuff is tough."

[Laughter]

**GATES:** So finally, you know, Rick then six months later sends me a certificate says that I'm a Nubian. Now no African-Americans are Nubian. Nubia runs between Khartoum and the second Cataract, which is just south of the Aswan Dam. But every black American wants fought the British nobly, and the Nubians were the black pharaohs--the ones we can demonstrate to have been the 25th Dynasty in Egypt. But, anyway, all of this comes together. This thing that had happened to me when my father showed me my grandfather's scrapbook--the picture of Jane Gates--when I was 10. And then this DNA thing from Rick Kittles, about which I was dubious, but I figured we could figure it out.

**WEINSTEIN:** Quick thought.

**GATES:** And I am--so I did this series and it was phenomenally successful. I mean, more successful than anything I could ever imagine.

And what I learned, first of all, the Mormons did our genealogical work under the direction of Johnny Surni, who probably knows as much about black genealogy as anybody. And they found my family. I could find--I wasn't interested in my mother's family. They were much more conservative. You know, they were very straight, and I was not straight. And so I liked the Gates because they were interesting, they were intriguing, They were Episcopalian, they drank, they cussed, you know, they were worldly. You know, I was



always fighting with my mother's brothers all the time. Not all of them, but a couple of them.

My cousin Arnold can tell anybody who wants to ask him later. But I found out that my mother's family was extraordinarily-- my mother used to just say, "We come from people." My mother is descended from three sets of free negroes, but in two sets freed before 1800. And her third great grandfather, and my fourth great grandfather, and Arnold Coleman's fourth great grandfather fought in the American revolution. Free negro, mustered in Winchester, Christmas day of 1778, and mustered out in 1784. They gave me back my--I have a family tree as detailed as anybody's family tree really, full of black people, which hangs in the kitchen of my house, which these genealogists gave me, and they were all black people who lived around Cumberland, Maryland, and Piedmont, West Virginia. They were right there buried in the courthouse, buried in the archive all that time and I had no idea.

But the second thing I learned was that through genealogy we can give an average black person back--we can restore black history for each person in this room from ancestor to ancestor, from generation on up or down, in a way today, because of Ancestry.com, and because so many records have been digitized. In a way that will change the larger narrative of the African-American people.

Historians, such as these distinguished gentlemen, generalize often from very small samples, particularly when it comes to African-Americans, so that when you find out something like Don Cheadle discovers that he's enslaved by the Chickasaw. He had no idea.

We are changing the data that historians will use and generalize from--generation to generation, ancestor to ancestor, and that is a powerful tool. So I am a missionary for ancestry tracing for the African-American people, because if enough of you all do it, it will change the narrative of African-American history, and, collectively, the narrative of American history, and that will be a good thing.

[Applause]

**WEINSTEIN:** Two quick questions from the audience, and one longer question for our main speaker. How many Nubians are here? Anybody?

[Laughter]

Ok, and how many people get their best ideas in the shower?

[Laughter]



Ok, question for you, born of personal experience. My parents are immigrants to this country from czarist Russia.

**GATES:** Right. Very hard to do your family tree.

**WEINSTEIN:** Very hard to do the family tree. Exactly so. But even harder to trust what I was getting, because my mother had a wonderful story about how she had been in the Triangle Fire and saved her life because she and her boyfriend had played hooky and gone into Central Park. It was wonderful. It was glorious to listen to. It just wasn't true.

Memory--and I found out it wasn't true when I managed to obtain the papers having to do with her becoming an American citizen here. She arrived in the country two years after the Triangle Fire. Now is my mother a liar? I'd never call her--bite my tongue.

**GATES:** No, she probably believed it.

**WEINSTEIN:** She probably believed it. But it gets to the heart of what is so much a dilemma for people who've plowed the layers as you have.

**GATES:** Right.

**WEINSTEIN:** At what point—how do you evaluate memory, as opposed to actuality?

**GATES:** You always start with memory. You interview everybody in the family and you write down all of their stories. Even when you know that the stories aren't true, you just listen and you're polite. And then you slowly explain to them that this is the way it really happened, and here-- but you have to show the data. Because basically they're ready to throw you out. They go, "Well, that's not the way I heard it. The way I heard it was--" And you go, "Yes, I know, but let's look at this piece of paper."

[Laughter]

And people are--I try to do it in a funny way. See, what happens is if we selected you to be in the series-- and my next series is called "The Faces of America." I just got the funding in this climate--which, thank God--But so many people said to me, "Why only black people?" I was on "Colbert" on Tuesday night, and he said to me--he's so crazy, I love Stephen Colbert. But he said, "Well, we've got a black man in the White House. It's the end of Black History Month, it's the end of Black History. What are you going to do for a job?"

[Laughter]



So I said, "I'm going to write about white people like you, Steven." I said, "After all, the market's bigger anyway." Well, what we didn't tell the audience was that he had already agreed six months ago to be in my next series.

I'm doing two Jewish Americans, two Catholic Americans, two Asian Americans, two Latino Americans, two West Indian Americans, and maybe a Native American. And so far--on Friday Eva Longoria agreed. Now you know I was hard to live with on Friday. Oh, man. I talked to her myself. I said, "Yes!" I asked her--

**BUNCH:** And he won't let anybody help. I volunteered.

**GATES:** No. And Tony Parker. I said, "We don't need Tony." Yo-Yo Ma, Frank Gehry, Malcolm Gladwell, whose mother's a West Indian, and I was just saying backstage that at 5:15

I talked to John Landau, who's Bruce Springsteen's agent. Didn't Springsteen--didn't he turn it out at the Super Bowl? Man, it was bad. It was bad. So we got a lot of people lined up. Kristi Yamaguchi is considering it. But we'll have 10 more people, or 12 people. But what happens is--now we'll go--Springsteen's agent said Bruce doesn't know anything about his family, but his mother does. So we'll go and have them fill out forms--as much data as they can give us--the names, whatever they think. Then we interview them and get stories. And then we turn a team of genealogists loose on the records to see if the stories--if the oral and the written match up. And then we don't tell them anything until we sit down and I present the "Book of Life." And I start with them and take them back as far as we can with visual evidence, and textual evidence, and I walk them through their family history, and then when the paper trail is over, I do their DNA to talk about their more distant ancestors. And sometimes--the only people ever got mad at me were my own family.

**WEINSTEIN:** Of course.

**GATES:** And my Aunt Helen, you know, when I told her that the story was we knew that we were descended from a white man, and we were told his name--on the Gates' side--and we were told his name was Samuel Brady. And we know that I'm descended from an Irishman because I have the Oneal haplotype, which 8% of all men in Ireland have.

It's your genetic signature, and there's nothing you can do about it. It's your Y-DNA. But we advertised for descendents of Samuel Brady, and these two guys—PBS is put all these ads out. PBS is doing a series about the descendents of Samuel Brady. They didn't say it was the black descendents of Samuel Brady.

[Laughter]



So these two white guys show up and they call me and they go, "What do we do now?" I said, "Well, you've got to tell them the truth." So these guys were really good about it, and they go, "We'd be delighted. We hope we're your cousins." I was really touched by that. And they revealed to me on camera that I have nothing in common with Samuel Brady--nothing, absolutely nothing. And then I had to go and tell my 89-year-old Aunt Helen, who's now dead, and my 91-year-old daddy. So I tell them on camera and Aunt Helen looks at me, looks at this DNA thing and goes, "Huh!" She said, "I've been a Brady 89 years, I'm still a Brady."

[Laughter]

**WEINSTEIN:** Lonnie. I don't know where you plug into this, Lonnie, but--

**BUNCH:** Well, one of the things that's interesting to me—and I'd love to get your take on it is that what you're able to do is help people go back into slavery where before we couldn't. There was always this great sort of gap. And oftentimes African-Americans try to jump back to Africa.

**GATES:** Oh, right.

**BUNCH:** And so one of the questions that I'm always wrestling with is how to help people both embrace their African ancestry, but also not run away from their period of enslavement.

**GATES:** Absolutely. In fact, because as you know, as well as I, and as quiet as it's kept today, many of us, particularly my age, my generation, were raised to be embarrassed about slavery. I've heard African-Americans--I even had--I'm not going to say who it was, but it was a prominent black American female. Last summer at Martha's Vineyard, at a table full of white people, say--really black—she and her husband and me, we were the only black people there. She said she didn't come from slavery. I'm saying, "Well, where the hell did you come from?"

[Laughter]

And she had this story that her ancestor was an Ebon princess who got off a boat in North Carolina, and a German aristocrat saw her and snatched her up and married her right away.

**BUNCH:** Fell in love.

**GATES:** And she just skipped the slavery completely. And I went like, "Hey, you're joking, right?" She got mad at me, man. Like, embarrassing me in front of them white people.



[Laughter]

And, so in my book, as you guys know, I say, there are three big lies--myths of African-American genealogy. One is that I'm descended from an Ebon princess. One is that my grandmother, my great-grandmother had high cheekbones and straight black hair.

**BUNCH:** Cherokee.

**GATES:** Cherokee, black foot, I say. Black foot. Only 5% of the African-American people, according to the latest DNA evidence have a significant amount of Native American ancestry. It's a myth. And the third myth is, "My ancestors were not slaves." We were all slaves. The question is when you became free.

**BUNCH:** Right.

**GATES:** And over 90% of our ancestors became free with the 13th Amendment, not even the Emancipation Proclamation, which David Blight estimates freed 500,000 slaves. But what killed the institution of slavery was the 13th Amendment, which was ratified in December of 1865.

You have to deal with--it's easier--Chris Rock said this to me on camera. It's easier to fantasize a Native American black ancestry, than to deal with rape, or sexual subjection, between white and black people. And that's just a metaphor for why we can't deal with slavery. It took till 1972 for a black man to write a book about slavery from the slave's point of view, and, as I said earlier, that was John Blasingame. It was an embarrassment, it was painful, it was complicated. There are many reasons that people wouldn't deal with it.

But I think now we're much better. God knows, Alex Haley contributed as much as anybody in helping us to understand slavery and be proud of that. And now when you go to the Swann Auction Gallery, you buy slave manacles. People are proud of that. But when I was growing up, they weren't proud of that, but they weren't proud of Africa either.

**BUNCH:** That's right.

**GATES:** And it was easier to project an imaginary African ancestry. We're all princes walking around being Humjambo Wanna.

**BUNCH:** That's right, that's right.

**GATES:** But without the African slave trade, there wouldn't have been a slave trade. You know, if humanity started in Africa, so did the slave trade, of Africans selling each other into slavery. They weren't unique. The word slave comes from "Slav." Everybody had slavery. And we were as guilty as anybody else. And, in fact, when Edward Jones



published "The Known World," there was an historian named Thomas Presley. Everybody should read this article. Thomas Presley is retired at the University of Washington. And he went through Carter Woodson's book. Carter Woodson did these—you know, the second black man to get a PhD in history from Harvard, the father of African-American history. Carter Woodson published a book called "The Free Negro Heads of Households in the 1830 Census." Then he also went back to look at the black people who owned slaves.

And no one had ever put these figures together. In the southern States, a huge percentage of the free negro heads of households who lived in the slave states also owned slaves, with the average number being four. Now the first thing that people say is they owned their own relatives. Not if you own people 16 people or 18 people. A lot of black people owned slaves, too, because it was an economic institution. So what I do as a scholar, and what my series is trying to do is encourage people to look at the African American and the African experience on both sides of the Atlantic.

And I'll tell you something else, Allen, when I conceived of this series--I sold this series--look, once I got Quincy Jones to be in the series, and then Oprah, it's like a giant--I'd go into these corporations--a giant ATM would come out of the ceiling.

[Whooshing]

Cool. The big O, man.

**BUNCH:** That's why they're on my board.

**GATES:** Yeah, that's right. Um...thinking about all that money made me lose my train of thought.

[Laughter]

**GATES:** But I pitched this series around the Kunta Kinte moment. I would say to Coca-Cola, "Your product is going to be associated with me revealing to the world Oprah Winfrey's African ancestry." But that, as you can see even from the trailer, is not what moved people. What moved people was not the revelation of their genetic ancestry, it was the revelation of their genealogical ancestry in slavery on this side of the Atlantic. When I told Chris Rock, here is your--this man was a slave. Julius Caesar Tingman was a slave until the fall of Charleston. The day afterwards he joined the U.S. Colored Troops, and fought nobly for the next year to free other slaves--that's why he broke down and cried.

And then he was elected to the House of Representatives from the state of South Carolina. And Chris' mother is a Tingman, and they had no idea. And the man is then kicked out of the House of Representatives in South Carolina when reconstruction ends in 1876, he becomes a dirt farmer But by 1904 owns 21 acres of land, free and clear, and



when he dies in 1916, had two life insurance policies, in addition to 65 acres of land. That is a noble story, man.

**BUNCH:** Absolutely.

**GATES:** That is a great story. And you could look in all the history books ever written by black people, white people, and this brother's story is not in there. It is now, but it wasn't at that time. Or take Oprah. You want to know why Oprah's Oprah? Constantine Winfrey shows up in the 1870 census in Mississippi living next to Absalom Winfrey, a white man. All right? 1876, he walks up to a white man named John Watson, and he says, "You know those 80 acres that you have of bottom land, gently rolling hills, covered with timber and a river going through it?" He goes, "Yeah, boy, why?" He said, "If I pick eight bales of cotton, that's 12,000 pounds—eight bales of cotton on my own time, give you that cotton, clean cotton, lint cotton, will you give me those 80 acre of land?" And he goes, "Yeah, if you could pick it in two years."

And he knew that it was a fool's errand, that he couldn't do it, and he made him sign a document that said that if you're even one ounce short, I keep all the cotton and I keep the land.

And we know that this brother was successful because I hand Oprah on camera a land deed signed by John Watson's widow. The guy dies, the widow in Mississippi in 1881, hands over the 80 acres of land to Oprah Winfrey's great-grandfather, and a year later in 1882, Constantine Winfrey pays cash for the adjacent 250--80 acres of land paying \$250. Now you want to know why Oprah's Oprah? That's why Oprah Winfrey is Oprah. And he signed it himself. So while he's picking all that cotton, he's illiterate in 1870, and he's literate by 1880, and Absalom Winfrey was his master. That is an amazing story—not in any history book till now.

**WEINSTEIN:** Right. You're right.

**GATES:** Black history is buried on your family tree. So go to the National Archives and get to work.

**WEINSTEIN:** first of all, if somebody would like to ask a question, now's the time, or make a comment, to get to the microphones. Oprah, if you're listening to this, he didn't mean to give away any secrets over here. Keep buying the land, and give some of that money to Lonnie.

**GATES:** She's been buying that land ever since.

**BUNCH:** I was just going to say.



**WEINSTEIN:** Give some of that money to Lonnie so he can build

**WEINSTEIN:** his new home.

**GATES:** I hope she does.

**BUNCH:** Well, let me ask while we're wading through it, let me ask you a question. You know, you mentioned something about with the election of Barack Obama, people are saying it's a new world, it's a post-racial world. You know, why should African-American history still exist? Give me your take on all this post-racial America.

**GATES:** I just think it's the biggest ton of rubbish I've ever heard. I mean, the percentage of black children living at or beneath the poverty line the day Martin Luther King was so tragically killed--murdered--was about 38%, if I'm remembering correctly. The last time I looked it was about 33%. That figure hasn't changed since November 4th. All the structural problems that our people face are still there. Now we have a reason to be inspired. It was one of the happiest days of my life. I didn't even let myself celebrate until Wolf Blitzer at 11:00 said--ding, ding, ding, you know, "A black man is elected president of the--" I jumped up and had tears in my eyes. But I didn't even believe it was possible. We have a long way to go. I think the most important impact, the most significant impact to Barack Obama's election will be perhaps the most subtle, which is just even the worst, most virulent white racists seeing a competent black man, and such a strong loving family, every day in the White House, subliminally--that'll have a huge effect. I don't think everybody's going to join hands in this country and sing "We Shall Overcome" and everything is better. But I think that suddenly--even I am impressed.

When I went to the inauguration, I was in the yellow section, freezing my butt off like everybody else. But I had a seat, thank God. And when I looked up at that monitor, it was the face of Barack I had never seen before. When he was walking down that red carpet, game face on, man. I mean, he was the President. I went like, "Whoa!"

You know, like that is the most powerful man, not the most powerful—but there is the most powerful man in the United States. He was the president of the United States, and he is.

**WEINSTEIN:** If you've never seen Redd Foxx, you don't understand what you've just watched.

[Laughter]

Several months ago we had Dan Shore here, and Dan Shore and I went to the same high school.

**GATES:** Where was that?



**WEINSTEIN:** Dewitt Clinton in the Bronx.

**GATES:** Uh-huh. That's where James Baldwin went.

**WEINSTEIN:** And they said, "Dan, let's sing the school song." Nobody thought he could do it. He sang the school song. And moved the audience away. Do you want to sing "We Shall Overcome," holding hands?

**GATES:** You want to sing yours?

**WEINSTEIN:** I don't want to sing, we've done Dewitt Clinton."

**GATES:** Oh, ok.

**WEINSTEIN:** But "We Shall Overcome."

**GATES:** Oh, "We Shall-- You want to sing "We Shall Overcome"?"

**WEINSTEIN:** With the audience.

**BUNCH:** Not me, I can't sing worth a lick.

[Laughter]

**GATES:** Maybe we'll sing it at the end.

[Laughter]

That's a sweet ending. Wait a minute, I think--did you want to let—

**BUNCH:** No, we're going to let--

**GATES:** Ok.

**BUNCH:** Go ahead.

**WEINSTEIN:** We'll alternate.

**SOLEDAD MONDIVIA:** Yeah, my name is Soledad Mondivia. I just wanted you to know if you have some thoughts. When I was in college, I read the encyclopedia that you actually published.

**GATES:** "Africana."



**MONDIVIA:** Yeah, "Africana," and I found out about black folks in many parts of Latin America and stuff like that. I read the part about Venezuela, which is my country of origin, and I wanted to know more about, I guess, any of the studies that you're doing about African heritage people of Venezuela.

**GATES:** Oh, great.

**MONDIVIA:** Keeping the fact that when I went back this past year, I visited one of my cousins who happens to be a permanent—how do you call it--well, he dances drum music, at the same time, he performs with a group. And he explained to me that whatever part in Venezuela you go to, the drums change given how a lot of our people from either West Africa or Central Africa got here, through slavery and stuff like that, whatever, so I wanted to know if you had any more thoughts about it.

**GATES:** Yeah, it's a good--great question. I got the funding—just got the funding for my next series, after "Faces of America," the immigration series, I'm doing "Blacks of Latin America."

[Applause]

**GATES:** Yeah. That'll be great. It's like the triangle trade. I did on one called "America Behind the Color Line," on race and class in America a few years ago. And then I did a six-part series on Africa, and I got in a lot of trouble because I was talking about the African role in the slave trade and people--black people didn't want me to talk about that. And now I'm going to do "Blacks in Latin America," and I'm sure I'll piss somebody off down there, too.

**MONDIVIA:** That would be fine with me.

**GATES:** Yeah. So that'll be really good. We also--I sponsored—it wasn't even my idea--Barbara Solow, who you know is a great economic historian, and her husband, Robert Solow, got the Nobel Prize in Economics from MIT.

When I went to Harvard in 1991, she came to me and she said, "If you raise money to bring together all of the people trying to count the slaves, you will have done something good."

And that's what I did. I got a jumpstart at this project under the direction of David Elthis. It's now finished. It's called "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database." And we can now count--we can document that 12.5 million Africans were shipped from Africa to the New World between the year 1514 and 1867. And we know how many went to Venezuela, how many went to the Caribbean. And I'll tell you the biggest surprise, when Lonnie asked what surprised me, this is the third thing that surprised me--of the 12.5 million Africans



who were shipped out of Africa, 15% died in the Middle Passage, so subtract that and you're at, what, 10.8, something like that, arrive in the New World. Of that 10.8 million, do you know how many came to the United States? Less than 500,000.

**WOMAN:** Wow.

**GATES:** All the rest went to South America and the Caribbean. The 35 million African-American people grew from the approximately 500--450-500,000 Africans who came here, and 75% of our ancestors were here, of those Africans were here by the day Thomas Jefferson wrote the "Declaration of Independence." 99% were here by 1820. So you can now go on this website--just Google "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," and you can see where they came from. And Angola sent 67% of the slaves to South America because they all went straight to Brazil. And Angola sent 23.6% of all the slaves that came to the United States. So if I did your DNA everybody black in this room, 23.8% will be from tribes or ethnic groups from Senna Gambia, and almost exactly that number will be from Angola, too. It's fascinating. So we're part of the generation that's lived to see technology, and research methods, and science all converge. And that's what, I think--why my series was so popular, because it was like "Roots" in a test tube, "Roots" for the 21st century.

**WEINSTEIN:** I like that. A'Lelia, quick, quick, jump in.

**A'LELIA BUNDLES:** Skip, congratulations on another book.

**GATES:** Thank you.

**BUNDLES:** We've talked a little about the--

**GATES:** This is Madam CJ Walker's granddaughter, ladies and gentlemen, and a great author herself.

[Applause]

**BUNDLES:** Thanks. Thank you, Skip. But we've talked a little bit about--

**GATES:** Harvard woman. Harvard woman.

**BUNDLES:** That's right, I went to Harvard. Um...About the Revolutionary War patriots, veterans, African-America veterans a little bit, and I'm just wondering where that project is.

**GATES:** Yeah, I--when the genealogists told me on camera for "African-American Lives I" that I was descended from a black man who had fought in the American Revolution--I mean, that was my crying moment. I mean, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't even have made that up. And I wouldn't have dared to make that up. Excuse me. And so I figured I'm a



reasonably well-educated person, and if I didn't know that, there must be a lot of black people who fought in the Revolution, and a lot of their heirs who didn't know that. So I started a project at Harvard under the direction of one of our main genealogists, Jane Ayles, who lives right over near Winchester. And she has documented now 5,000--that was always the number, but people were just guessing. We have found the records of 5,000 black men who have--we can prove--fought in the American Revolution, and we're on track for 25,000. Now I was inducted--my brother--his son and I were inducted into the Sons of the American Revolution. And this is like the whitest organization I ever saw. We walked in there and there were all these film crews because it was such a big deal. At the time, I think there were less than 20 black men who were in the Sons of the American Revolution.

So when we walked in this big auditorium in Houston, or Dallas--can't remember where it was--two years ago-- my brother looked at me, we looked at all these white guys and go, "You sure we want to do this?" I go, "Yeah, we gotta do this." So I give this speech and I announce this project. We call it "The Black Patriots Project." At Harvard we're going to-- all we did--what the genealogist did was to look at the 80,000 pension applications, which are here at the National Archive, and match the names against the census. You don't have to be a genius to figure this out, right? It's just that nobody did it. It's labor intensive. And there's John Redman who was a negro, and there's his pension application.

So I said to my new compatriot brothers, I said, "We're going to find so many black people that a year from now when I come back, this room is going to look just like Harlem."

[Laughter]

And nobody laughed.

[Laughter]

Nobody laughed.

**BUNCH:** They took your membership away.

[Laughter]

**WEINSTEIN:** I spoke a year ago, Skip.

**GATES:** I said, I was just joking. I was just joking.

[Laughter]



**WEINSTEIN:** About a year ago I spoke to the Mount Vernon chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, and I can assure you there are more black there than Jews.

**GATES:** Oh, yeah, that's true.

**BUNCH:** Please.

**MYRA FRAZIER:** Hi, my name's Myra Frazier, and, Dr. Gates, I first heard you speak as a senior at Tufts University when you read a section from *Our Nig*.

**GATES:** Yeah.

**FRAZIER:** With Jewel Bell and Vivie Clark and Gerald Gill and Pearl Robinson, et cetera. So that was my first exposure to you.

**GATES:** That was a great day.

**FRAZIER:** It surely was.

**GATES:** I had just discovered *Our Nig*.

**FRAZIER:** Right. And you shared that with a group of students at Tufts, and I thank you for that.

**GATES:** Thank you.

**FRAZIER:** My question, or my comment is that I recently started going to black memorabilia shows and scouring the collections of deceased African-Americans, and I was almost mortified to find the number of signed books that are in those collections. I actually found a signed book of Pauline Marshall, the first copy of "Praise Song to the Widow," found a copy--a book that Randy Kennedy had written--had signed--for Carl Rowan, and on, and on, and on. And then an uncut--

**GATES:** All for sale.

**FRAZIER:** Right.

**FRAZIER:** And then a James Baldwin that was lying--a signed copy of James Baldwin that was at the bottom, you know, with ripped pages, and the like. And my point is this--as many prominent African-Americans who have collected extensive libraries over the years, particularly during the civil rights movement--hymnbooks, et cetera--how do we as African-



Americans begin to reclaim a lot of incredible history--signed books, and, you know, manuscripts that are lying in black memorabilia shows, and bring that material in as these people are dying?

**GATES:** Well, I have an idea. I think we should start an African-American Museum, and put it on the Mall, make a lot of money.

[Applause]

And, I really--you know, you really need to give it up for Lonnie, but what he's doing, he'll be remembered for all time as the first director of this great museum.

[Applause]

**GATES:** I think you should speak to her.

**BUNCH:** Sure. Well, I'm going to speak to all of you because the most important thing is that while there's a lot that's being sold, there's a lot in your homes, in your basements, in your attics. And that what we need to do is we're at this moment where within the next decade we're going to lose more than we've lost in the last hundred years. So the key is to find that material, preserve it, give it to institutions. You want to give it to me? I'll take it. But the most important thing is to preserve it because right now we are at that pivotal moment. So I hope to encourage you to do just that.

**GATES:** And I go to auctions. I go to the Swann Gallery and spend a lot of money every year. I mean, personally and institutionally. Um...I'm a junkie, just like you are. I can't get enough. And there are lots of us out there. There are a lot of African- American museums--in Baltimore the Reginald Lewis Museum, in Detroit, et cetera, et cetera, but this is going to be the big bopper when it's done.

**BUNCH:** We do a good job, but I can't compete with Skip. He brings that big money when he goes to buy.

**GATES:** Well, what happens to me is I'll decide I want something and I don't care how much it costs. I mean, unless I'm up against the other Gates.

**BUNCH:** That's right.

**FRAZIER:** Thank you.

**WEINSTEIN:** Yes, over here.

**GATES:** Thank you.



**WOMAN:** I've been coming here for 30 years. I've been in the trenches as a genealogist. And you speak of wanting to be a missionary in a sense of combining genealogy with history. What would be a good way for those of us who are genealogists to approach historians? Because from my own experience, we embrace, and we love historians, but it's not the same way in reverse.

**GATES:** Right. No, you're right. She's absolutely right. There is a two-class system. So historians would look down their nose at genealogists. That's why I put these genealogists on TV.

You know, I give them credit, and I've raised money to set them up with research projects. And I think that the way--the only way we're going to get new data to change the narrative of African-American history, to make it richer, is through genealogical research, unless you find a treasure trove of--unless you find the equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls for black people, you know, which...good luck. But there are so many stories buried on family trees, and I have shown that dramatically. 25 million people watched "African-American Lives I," my Oprah one-hour special on "African-American Lives II." That's just in the first—you know, in the week that they were on the first time. And I'm hoping that that will lead to a revolution in the relationship between historians and genealogists. God knows the number of black people doing their family trees is greater than it was five years ago. If you go out to the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, it is packed. It's full of black people. And it's like black church people. "Ah, hey, Jesus!"

[Laughter]

Every time they find another ancestor they whoop and holler and cry and stuff. It cracks me up.

[Laughter]

**WEINSTEIN:** How many genealogists in the audience? Can I see that?

**GATES:** Wow, we have all these genealogists.

**WEINSTEIN:** A lot of you.

**GATES:** That's great. I love the genealogists.

**WEINSTEIN:** How many of you have used the National Archives in the last five years?

**GATES:** Me.



**WEINSTEIN:** How many of you have not--have been ignored, or dealt with in anything less than a respectful way at the National Archives in the last five years? I want to see if anybody's out there.

**WOMAN:** Can I make a comment on that?

**WEINSTEIN:** Sure.

**WOMAN:** I just want to applaud you for the changes that you've made in this institution. I came here in 1976 as a 13-year-old child, and every year that I came here I was told practically that I couldn't find information. And, being that I was young, I didn't pay attention to anybody. You know, because I just figured if Alex Haley could find something, I was going to find something. My first day I found my ancestors.

**GATES:** Oh, wow.

**WOMAN:** And I am now the sole African-American Professional genealogist working for a lineage society in this country. And you know who I am. Hollis Gentry and I work for DAR.

**GATES:** Oh, yeah. You were great.

**WOMAN:** Now, mind you, when I was 13, one would never have imagined at that time that I would be able to grow up and work in this Profession.

**GATES:** right.

**WOMAN:** And I can say that I was one of those people who stood in line, and if you didn't get here by 8:45 in the morning, you were not getting into the Archives, after Alex Haley.

**BUNCH:** That's right.

**WOMAN:** Right now we have all this technology, we have all this information, and people are not coming in like they used to. And, as you mentioned earlier, we've got ancestry, we've got all these databases. Some of us are making discoveries, but there's this disconnect. We find these things. And I reach out to scholars a lot and I'll say, "I found something that's relevant to your research." you have to forgive me because this is something that's very close to my heart.

**GATES:** No, and she's a pioneer. I mean, she's trying to integrate the Daughters of the American Revolution. Hello!

[Laughter]



**WOMAN:** And I just applaud you for the changes that you've made here because I can witness--I witness it on a regular basis.

And many of you in the audience who may not have used this facility, do not know the different things that we've had. There's Reggie Washington in the back. He's one of the most phenomenal persons that--

[Applause]

And I praise him to the highest because I--and I know that there are others in here. And I'm forgetting some of the names of some of the other staff. But you have an outstanding group of people.

**WEINSTEIN:** They're wonderful. And that will continue, and if it doesn't continue, just slip a little note in the box, and Zorro will come and take care of you.

[Scattered applause]

But you have to find—the woman who introduced me at one of my speeches at one of the theological organizations, as the "Alchemist of the United States." And I lost track of her. I want to find her.

**GATES:** We didn't feel welcome in places like this 30 years ago. You're absolutely right. But now that we do, primarily because of the transforming element of people like Allen. And that's a really, really-- it's a really important thing. So give it up.

[Applause]

But Donald Graham and I started theroot.com and I hope you all look at theroot.com every day. It's a black Slate.com. But unlike any other of these news websites, it has a whole reach channel. And we are trying to improve it, so if you want to write for it, if you have ideas of how we can use it, I mean, we reach thousands--tens of thousands--hundreds of thousands--millions some days--of people a day in terms of page views. So any way that you can help us improve it and the Root can serve as a facilitator for the discovery of roots, that would be great. And you know how to reach me, so please do. Ok?

**WEINSTEIN:** We have room for one more question, but if people would just make your statement or question--all of them out, and then we'll just have our main speaker respond, and we'll give Lonnie the last word. So please jus—what were you going to say?

**BUNCH:** It's this side. This side.

**GATES:** It's his turn.



**TOM MANSBECK:** My name is Tom Mansbeck and, Skip, my family also came from Piedmont, West Virginia.

**GATES:** Oh, my God.

**MANSBECK:** And I was also in Calhoun College.

**GATES:** Oh, yeah?

**MANSBECK:** But my question is--

**GATES:** That's a miracle.

**MANSBECK:** Many years before you, I can assure you. My question is I notice that most of the people in your film are entertainers, actors, presenters. I'm wondering if you talk to business people like Dick Parsons, or Barbara Sheila Johnson, and if so, what kind of response you got from them.

**GATES:** Well, Linda Johnson Rice is a business person, and, you know, she owns "Ebony."

**MANSBECK:** Right.

**GATES:** I asked Ken Chenault, the CEO of Amex, who is a friend of mine. I asked Stanley O'Neal, former CEO of Merrill Lynch, who is a very good friend of mine. These guys are incog-negro, man. You know, they didn't want--they said to me, "Are you crazy? I mean, one glitch and my money's gone."

**BUNCH:** That's right.

**GATES:** So they're low Profile guys. But I really wanted--I wanted entrepreneurs or the CEO's, but none of them would do it except Linda Johnson.

**WEINSTEIN:** Let's take the two of you there, and the three of you're here.

**GATES:** But I love business people. I want to talk to you later. You, me, and Arnold Coleman from Piedmont, West Virginia--that is--and another one? Man, the roof's going to fall in.

**BUNCH:** I was just going to say, "duck."

**MAN:** My question is just I want to know when all this history can be incorporated in the public schools like it should be, because it's supposed to be American history.



**GATES:** My next series, God willing, after "Latin America," will be the first comprehensive history of the African-American people on TV. You see, there have been over 100 documentaries--more--on African-American history, but they're all bits and pieces. Like "Eyes on the Prize" is about the civil rights movement. Nobody has taken this from West Africa to Barack Obama. So my last scene--I have it scripted--my last scene, I'm sailing down the Potomac toward the White House.

[Laughter]

Me and Barack. Captain black man. I'm going to do it. Got to be an eight-hour series. The reason that I say that is it's trickle down. Once we have a series that anybody anywhere--you know, in Idaho--you know, wherever, the whitest place in the world. I met Sarah Palin at the Alfalfa Dinner--I give Sarah--she said, "You can go fishing with me." I go, "Yeah, yeah." But once--anybody can teach it, then we have lesson plans and a textbook, then no one can keep it out of the schools. There are some textbooks, but there is no one DVD through which you can teach it. And from my opinion--my point of view--you agree? I think that's crucial.

**WEINSTEIN:** Yeah, I agree.

**GATES:** Because we need--I love Black History Month. The coldest, darkest, shortest month--the month left over--they gave it to black people, right? But I want everyday to be Black History Month. I want white kids to learn about black history. I want everybody to learn about black history. I want it to be incorporated into the curriculum. That will change race relations eventually.

**MAN:** Exactly.

**GATES:** When it's normal, naturalized You know, it's not like 28 days you dress up and talk about Kwanzaa and all that stuff, which is fine. But I want it normalized and naturalized. And that's what I hope will be my contribution to it.

**WOMAN:** So the last, last question is over here, right?

**BUNCH:** That's right. Yes, ma'am.

**GATES:** Yes, ma'am.

**WOMAN:** Thank you.

**GATES:** I'm sorry this is over. I'm having a good time. I'm just shifting gears.

**BUNCH:** Please.



**WOMAN:** I met you at the Plesi meeting and we talked about the black patriots.

**GATES:** Oh, yes.

**WOMAN:** Because I was a volunteer at the time at the Black Patriots Society.

**GATES:** Uh-huh.

**WOMAN:** And the thesis was if the war--the Revolutionary War-- is in fact the author of this country--

**GATES:** Yes.

**WOMAN:** Then anybody who fought in that war is also a part of that authorship.

**GATES:** Absolutely.

**WOMAN:** Now, I'm wondering--and this question is not just to you, but also to Dr. Bunch-- what happened to the Black Patriots Society and the land that had been appropriated for the monument there? You recall that the, uh...a coin was issued. I think Archives, in fact, presented it, a coin for--I can't think of his name now--Crispus Attucks--that was distributed by the Black Patriots Society. And my question is, is it being absorbed into the new museum? And, if so, how important is the role going to be? You know, how significant will its presence be.

**BUNCH:** Well, I mean, I think it's a crucial story and an important part of what the museum will explore. I don't know what has happened to the Black Patriot Society. I don't know. I do know that it's a story that we are making sure becomes highly visible as the museum opens on the National Mall.

**GATES:** And I've only been a patriot for two years, so--

[Laughter]

But I heard about that there was a society, and various people active have contacted me. So any way I can help to revitalize it, I'll be glad to do it. But when our research project's over, there'll be a lot more people eligible to be in the Black Patriot Society.

[INDISTINCT]

**WEINSTEIN:** Is that it?

**SECOND WOMAN:** May I?



**GATES:** Yeah, sure.

**SECOND WOMAN:** Good evening. I'm Hazel Trised Neeham, editor-in-chief of the NNPA news service, the black press of America.

**GATES:** Oh, great.

**HAZEL NEEHAM:** We serve more than 200 black-owned newspapers. Speaking of the root, which you mentioned earlier, it came across my desk this evening that there was an editorial, an OP ED on the front page this week called "The End of Black History Month." And so you've almost answered my question, but I'd like an answer pretty much for the record because I'm writing an article on the impact of President Obama's election on Black History Month. And so I'd like to know what do you feel about the end of Black History Month, particularly this article? But also whether or not the election of President Obama is going to hasten the integration of black history into American history.

**GATES:** Ok, good question. First of all, I'm the editor-in-chief of "The Root." I'm really the publisher. I'm the co-founder with Donald Graham. And we don't have an editorial unilateral voice. It's a signed article by someone. That's just their opinion.

**NEEHAM:** Yes. Sure.

**GATES:** And I can't in my position, obviously, comment. I mean, the person is entitled to their opinion.

**NEEHAM:** Obviously.

**GATES:** But we put it on the front page and we invite you to write something, too.

**NEEHAM:** Thank you.

**GATES:** I think that the Black History Month--Yeah, we're looking for writers all the time. I think that Black History Month will only grow in importance for the time being. I think that there will be more intense interest in teaching African-American history, Black History Month will become more vital. But there will be seepage into the other nine months of the school year. And that's what I want. I want my cake and I--I want to have my cake and eat it, too. I want there to be--that's a metaphor.

I want there to be African-American Studies departments, but I want history departments teaching American history to have a black content. I want both things. It's important to have both things. I like a month when you can concentrate on blackness, but I want it to--not--black history not to be relegated to that month only. I want both things. Eventually, if black history were integrated sufficiently, we wouldn't need a separate month. Like Vernon



Jordan at the Alfalfa Club did a parody of Barack--the first black president wearing a big hat on Abraham Lincoln, and he announced that his first decree was that March would be White History Month in the new era. You know, every day is White History Month. I want every day to be Black History Month, too. Do you agree with that? Do you see what I'm saying?

**NEEHAM:** It would be very nice, but do you think that will ever really happen? Do you think there will ever really be an end to Black History Month?

**GATES:** We're blacker today as a country than we could have imagined 20 years ago. You know, more white people talk black, more white people act black, dress black. We're more naturalized. You know, if it weren't true, Barack wouldn't have been elected. You know, that white people can imagine black people in a way that they couldn't when I was growing up.

**WEINSTEIN:** Is the lady next to you--are you waiting with a question as well? Ok.

**GATES:** But I don't think it'll happen in our lifetime, but I think eventually--yeah, I think eventually it will happen.

**NEEHAM:** Thank you.

**GATES:** Thank you.

**WEINSTEIN:** Closing thoughts.

**BUNCH:** Closing thoughts. I think that what you've all seen tonight is someone who has really been able to marry real academic brilliance with an understanding of how making that history accessible can change the world.

And in some ways, what I wanted to say to you is how much that those of us who labor in the field of history look up to you.

**GATES:** Oh.

**BUNCH:** It means a great deal to us. So I want to thank you for not only what you shared with us tonight, but for all the work that you have done, and for all the work that you will do.

**GATES:** Oh, God bless you. Thank you. [Applause] Thank you, Allen.

**WEINSTEIN:** We have...we have a...we have a few gifts for--our tradition here is a few modest gifts from The Archives. Sam, why don't you say what...



**BUNCH:** Go ahead, tell him what it is.

**SAM ANTHONY:** Professor Gates, if you'll open. And we'll show it on the screen here. We have three records from The National Archives that we've created into facsimiles. The first one, sir, on your left, is a letter written by Annie Davis to President Abraham Lincoln, on August 25th of 1864. As you know, the Emancipation had been signed before. But she writes: "Mr. President, it is my desire to be free to go see my people on the Eastern Shore. My mistress won't let me. You will please let me know if we are free and what I can do."

**GATES:** Oh, wow.

**ANTHONY:** "I write to you for advice. Please send me word this week as soon as possible and oblige." this is part of our records of Adjutant General's Office. Behind that, sir, is another record. It's a letter written by Samuel Cable to his wife in June of 1863. He was a private in the 55th Massachusetts, U.S. Colored troops and a slave before he joined the army. And in the letter is a poignant part where he says, "When I shall have the opportunity of seeing you in the full enjoyment of freedom, I would like to know if you are still in slavery."

Last is a record--is the first page of the act to continue enforce a bureau for the relief of freedmen and refugees. It was enacted in June of 1866.

Thank you very much sir.

**GATES:** Wow, thank you.

[Applause]

**GATES:** Thank you very much.  
That's great.

[Applause]

Thank you.

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