

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr.

---

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 29, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	1 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:22:53).
<b>Abstract:</b>	English professor Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr. (1950 - ) extended the application of the concept of "signifyin(g)" to analysis of African American works and thus rooted African American literary criticism in the African American vernacular tradition. The work gained Gates critical acclaim nationally, and he quickly translated his success into a more mainstream career as a "public intellectual," Gates was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 29, 2013, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_006
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

African American Studies scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. was born in Keyser, West Virginia on September 16, 1950, the son of Henry Louis Gates Sr. and Pauline Augusta Coleman. Gates first enrolled in college at Potomac State College in 1968, before transferring to Yale University in 1969. In 1970, he received a fellowship from Yale that would allow him to work and travel in Africa. Gates graduated from Yale in 1973, receiving his B.A. degree in History. Gates was also honored in 1973 with an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Award. The first such grant to be given to an African American, the award allowed Gates to study at the University of Cambridge, in the United Kingdom. At Cambridge, Gates enrolled in the Clare College, and studied English Literature. Gates was able to work with scholars such as Wole Soyinka, the first native of Africa to win a Pulitzer Prize, British Labor scholar Raymond Williams and literary critic George Steiner. While he returned to the United States in 1975, Gates continued his studies, and received PhD. in English Language and Literature from the University of Cambridge in 1979.

Gates enrolled at Yale Law School in 1975, but left after a month. He stayed at the New Haven, CT. institution, becoming a secretary at with the University's unit of African American Studies. In 1976, Gates was appointed as a lecturer in English and African American Studies, and named Director of Undergraduate Studies. Gates was made an Assistant Professor at Yale in 1979, and stayed at the University until 1985 While at Cornell University, where he served as a Professor of English, Literature and Africana Studies from 1985 to 1990, Gates groundbreaking text *Signifying Monkey A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, was released. A 1989 American Book Award winner, the work extended the application of the concept of "signifyin(g)" to analysis of African American works and thus rooted African-American literary criticism in the African American vernacular tradition. The work gained Gates critical acclaim nationally, and he quickly translated his success into a more mainstream career as a "public intellectual," writing pieces on race and other issues for publications like the New York Times, The New

Yorker, The Nation and The New Republic.

After a short stay at Duke University from 1989 to 1991, Gates moved onto Harvard University, where he became a Professor and Director of the W.E.B. DuBois Institute for African and African American Research, a position he still holds today. Gates was also the co-founder of TheRoot.com, an online magazine, and editor of the Oxford African American Studies Center.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 29, 2013, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 1 uncompressed MOV digital video files. English professor Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr. (1950 - ) extended the application of the concept of “signifyin(g)” to analysis of African American works and thus rooted African American literary criticism in the African American vernacular tradition. The work gained Gates critical acclaim nationally, and he quickly translated his success into a more mainstream career as a “public intellectual,”

---

## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

---

## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

---

## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

Harvard University

---

## Occupations:

English Professor

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

---

## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr., April 29, 2013. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

---

## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

---

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr., Section A2013\_006\_001\_001,  
TRT: 1:22:53 ?

Henry Louis “Skip” Gates, Jr. was born on September 16, 1950 in Keyser, West Virginia to Pauline Coleman Gates and Henry Louis Gates, Sr. His maternal fourth great-grandfathers, Isaac Clifford and John Redman, who served in the Patriot army, settled in Hardy County, Virginia as slavery ended. Gates’ maternal great-great-uncle, John Robert Clifford, later became the first African American lawyer in West Virginia, and a member of the Niagara Movement. Gates’ maternal grandfather, Paul Coleman, went on to work for the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company. Gates’ paternal fourth great-grandparents, Sarah Bruce and Joseph Bruce, were slaves of Abraham Van Meter in Hardy County, who were set free in 1836. His paternal great-grandfather, Edward Gates, and grandfather, Edward St. Lawrence Gates, owned a janitorial business in Virginia, while his grandmother, Gertrude Helen Redman Gates, was a housewife. Gates learned of his family history as the host of several African American genealogical specials on PBS.