

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr.

PERSON

Gates, Henry Louis

**Alternative Names:** Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr.;

**Life Dates:** September 16, 1950-

**Place of Birth:** Keyser, West Virginia, USA

**Work:** Cambridge, MA

**Occupations:** English Professor

## Biographical Note

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.

## Related Entries

**Yale University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**The University of Cambridge** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**M.A.**

**The University of Cambridge** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Ph.D.**

**Yale University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1987 to ?]

**Lecturer in English and Afro-American Studies,  
Director of Undergraduate Studies**

**Yale University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1984 to ?]

**Assistant Professor of English and Afro-American  
Studies**

**Yale University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1961 to ?]

**Associate Professor of English and Afro-  
American Studies**

**Duke University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1985 to 1988]

**Professor of English, Comparative Literature,**

**and Africana Studies**

**Cornell University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1973 to ?]

**W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of Literature**

**Duke University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1969 to ?]

**John Spencer Bassett Professor of English and Literature**

**Harvard University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1977 to ?]

**W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Humanities**

**Harvard University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1944 to ?]

**Professor of English and American Literature and Language**

**Harvard University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1976 to ?]

**Chair, department of African and African American Studies**

**Harvard University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1996 to ?]

**Director, W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research**

**Harvard University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1970 to 1974]

**Alphonse Fletcher University Professor**

**Oxford African American Studies Center** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1975 to 1978]

**Editor-in-Chief**

**Root.com** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1989 to 1991]

**Editor-in-Chief**

**Council on Foreign Relations** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**American Antiquarian Society** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Union of Writers of the African Peoples** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Association for Documentary Editing** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**African Roundtable** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**African Literature Association** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Afro-American Academy** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**American Studies Association** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Stone Trust** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Zora Neal Hurston Society** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Saturday Club** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**American Philosophical Society** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Cambridge Scientific Club** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**AfricanDNA.com** [MEMBEROF]

[from 2008 to ?]

**Co-Founder and Co-Owner**