

AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES

Thirteen/WNET New York
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PBS

press information

THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK PRESENTS *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES*, A PBS SERIES THAT TRACES BLACK FAMILY TREES THROUGH GENEALOGY AND DNA ANALYSIS, PREMIERING FEBRUARY 2006



Co-Produced By
Thirteen/WNET New York
and Kunhardt Productions



Renowned Scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. To Host Four-Hour Series

Dr. Ben Carson, Whoopi Goldberg, Bishop T.D. Jakes, Dr. Mae Jemison, Quincy Jones, Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Chris Tucker And Oprah Winfrey Participate In Illuminating Journey Of Discovery

An unprecedented four-part PBS series, *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* takes Alex Haley's Roots saga to a whole new level through moving stories of personal discovery. Using genealogy, oral history, family stories, and DNA analysis to trace lineages through American history and back to Africa, the series provides a life-changing journey for a diverse group of highly accomplished African Americans: a neurosurgeon, a TV pioneer/philanthropist, an astronaut, a music entrepreneur, a sociologist, a movie star, a pastor and a comedian. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois professor of the Humanities and chair of African and African American Studies at Harvard University, is the series host, revealing the participants' unique family histories while researching his own as well.

AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES will premiere Wednesdays February 1 and 8 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS. The series is a co-production of Thirteen/WNET New York and Kunhardt Productions Inc. Major funding is provided by The Coca-Cola Company and the following brands by the Procter & Gamble Company: Pringles®, Folgers®, Bounty®, Charmin®, Tide®, Downy®, Pampers®, Crest®. Additional funding for outreach activities is provided by the Corporation for

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Public Broadcasting.

AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES works to restore its participants' lineages in reverse chronological order. Starting with the oral histories of the individuals' families, and drawing on photographs, film clips, music and early personal records, Professor Gates begins to trace their family trees back through the 20th century. Noted historians and expert genealogists around America help fill in missing branches, in the process explaining how such major events as Jim Crow segregation and the post-World War I “Great Migration” from the South to the North helped shape African American families.

“This is one of the most exciting projects in which I have been involved,” said Professor Gates. “*AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* is about African American history, of course, but on a deeply personal level. Slavery deprived African Americans of their historical and familial memory, and this series is an attempt to restore that memory - on both sides of the Atlantic.”

Professor Gates' genealogical research becomes increasingly difficult as he proceeds back through the Reconstruction Era, Civil War, the Colonial and early slave trade periods in American history. When the genealogical road comes to an end, he turns to some of the country's leading scientists involved in cutting-edge work using DNA samples to trace ancestral roots back to Africa. Finally, Professor Gates joins one series participant in the last leg of the journey, across the Atlantic to the western coast of Africa. There, they visit an area where genetic, historical and anthropological evidence suggests that the participant's ancestors once lived.

In an era when ever-increasing numbers of Americans are investigating their genealogy, *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* provides a timely and powerful demonstration of how meaningful reclaiming one's past can be - as well as an unprecedented understanding of African American history. It is the first television series to explore black roots in both America and Africa using not only genealogy but also DNA, including fascinating stories of ancestors who were free during the time of slavery. And by spotlighting African American role models, the series hopes to

inspire millions to consider their own heritage, and underscore for all Americans the importance of knowing their past, in order to unlock the future.

“In addition to its poignant personal stories,” continued Professor Gates, “*AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* will be a great way to introduce young people to the marvels of archival and scientific research and their practical applications. I hope that this project will encourage them - and all Americans, especially those of African descent - to explore their roots.”

For some Americans, the essential question, “Where do I come from?” cannot be answered; their history has been lost or stolen. But through its genealogical research and groundbreaking DNA analysis, *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* will not only provide a transformational discovery for several prominent African Americans, but also serve as an example for all Americans of the empowerment derived from knowing their heritage.

To reconstruct the family trees of its participants, *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* is working in conjunction with Ancestry.com, a leading Internet-based genealogy firm with one of the largest online collections of family history records. Among the scientists involved in the series' DNA analysis is Dr. Peter Forster, a Fellow and Praelector at the University of Cambridge who has used DNA for genealogical, archeological and forensic casework; Dr. Fatimah Jackson, professor of Applied Biological Anthropology at the University of Maryland and co-founder of the first human DNA bank in Africa; Dr. Rick Kittles, co-founder of the ancestry-tracing firm African Ancestry, Inc., whose database contains over 20,000 lineages from more than 389 indigenous African populations; and Dr. Mark Shriver, associate professor of Anthropology & Genetics at Penn State University. Innovative new analytical techniques are also being developed for the project in conjunction with the Santa Clara-based biotechnology firm Affymetrix.

AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES will be accompanied by a far-reaching educational component. Working in cooperation with seven public television stations in key markets across the country, Thirteen's teacher-training initiative will provide direct, hands-on training to more

than 1,000 K-through-12 educators, guiding them in the use of the broadcast program, Web site, and print materials in standards-based classroom instruction. Extensive outreach is also being planned with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, as well as historical organizations and museums nationwide, to engage children and families of all ages in an exploration of their family origins. **AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES'** vibrant companion Web site will feature a beginner's guide to tracing one's own family tree, giving visitors step-by-step guidance in how to research their own past. The online component will also provide background on the science and scholarship featured in the series, extended interviews with series guests, and interactive learning tools that will appeal to all age levels.

AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES is a co-production of Thirteen/WNET New York and Kunhardt Productions. Episode one is produced and directed by Jesse Sweet; episode two is produced and directed by Leslie Asako GladsjØ; episode three is produced and directed by Leslie Farrell; and episode four is produced and directed by Graham Judd. Farrell and Judd are series producers, with Dyllan McGee as senior producer for Kunhardt Productions. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., William R. Grant and Peter Kunhardt are executive producers.

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About Thirteen/WNET New York

Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Stage on Screen*, *Secrets of the Dead*, and *Cyberchase* – as well as the work of Bill Moyers – to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as *The Ethnic Heritage Specials*, *The Thirteen Walking Tours*, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. With educational and community outreach projects that extend the impact of its television productions, Thirteen takes television “out of the box.” And as broadcast and digital media converge, Thirteen is blazing trails in the creation of Web sites, enhanced television, CD-ROMs, DVD-ROMs, educational software, and other cutting-edge media products. More information about Thirteen can be found at thirteen.org.

About Kunhardt Productions

Kunhardt Productions Inc. is an independent production company with a reputation for innovative programming and high editorial standards. Founded in 1989 by ABC News veteran Peter W.

Press Release

Kunhardt, the company's critically-acclaimed programs have garnered many awards, including a national Emmy. Recent productions include *Mandate: The People and the President* for PBS; and *Freedom: A History of US*, an eight-hour PBS series based upon Joy Hakim's award-winning books. Other notable works include: *My Brother and I*, a one-hour documentary (Bravo, 2003) based on Robert Kennedy's oral history of President Kennedy's administration; *In Memoriam*, a one-hour co-production with HBO and Brad Grey Television; *Violence: An American Tradition* (HBO, 1995 – nominated for two national Emmy awards); *The American President*, a 10-hour PBS series profiling the 41 presidents of the United States; *The Perfect Baby* (an ABC News/Barbara Walters Special on genetic engineering, 1990 – winner of the National Association of Science Writers Award); and *JFK: In His Own Words* (HBO, 1989 – winner of a national Emmy award for outstanding programming).

About PBS

PBS is a private, nonprofit media enterprise that serves the nation's 348 public noncommercial television stations, reaching nearly 90 million people each week. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is the leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of educational services for adult learners. Video resources for educators are available at www.shoppbs.com/teachers. PBS's premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online (pbskids.org), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at pbs.org, the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet. PBS is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.

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