

# OPRAH'S ROOTS

Thirteen/WNET New York  
450 West 33rd Street  
New York NY 10001-2605  
thirteen.org

## press information



For more information, contact:  
Tara Delaney Gilbride, (212) 572-2872;  
tgilbride@randomhouse.com

*"Knowing your family history is knowing your worth--your whole worth...It allows you to know what your mama went through, your grandmama went through, your great-grandmama went through, your grandfathers. It lets you know that you've been paid for--that there are lots of people who come before you who would have liked to have had what you have. I think about this all the time--you know, my ancestors could not have imagined the life that I now lead but for the work that they did that prepared the way."*

*-OPRAH WINFREY IN FINDING OPRAH'S ROOTS*

**By examining the family history of TV pioneer and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey, prominent scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. illuminates the dark shadows that have enveloped African American ancestry and reveals the method--and meaning--of tracing one's family history.**

## FINDING OPRAH'S ROOTS

### FINDING YOUR OWN

**By Henry Louis Gates, Jr.**

Crown; January 23, 2007

In **FINDING OPRAH'S ROOTS: FINDING YOUR OWN** (Crown; 1/23/07), prominent African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. shines a brilliant searchlight into the dark shadows that have enveloped African American ancestry. By assembling an elite team of historians and geneticists, and using Oprah and her forebears as his example, Professor Gates sheds fascinating light on Oprah's family background and simultaneously offers a user-friendly methodology for tracing one's own family tree. "If we want to go forward, we need to be able to look back and know where we came from," says Gates in the introduction. "We need to get ourselves grounded, and starting that process by grounding ourselves in our own family's extended past."

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*The Coca-Cola Company*



Professor Gates first collaborated with Ms. Winfrey on the PBS series *African American Lives* (February 2006), which featured the histories of nine participants, including Quincy Jones, Whoopi Goldberg, and Chris Tucker, among others. Instantly, viewers nationwide were drawn to the inspiring family stories. Now, Gates and Winfrey continue their discovery of amazing truths about Oprah's ancestors in *Oprah's Roots*, produced for PBS by Thirteen/WNET New York, Kunhardt Productions and Inkwell Films, airing on January 24, 2007 at 8 p.m. (ET). **FINDING OPRAH'S ROOTS: FINDING YOUR OWN** includes all the research and material from the series plus much more by answering the question Gates receives most often: "How can I trace my own roots?".

**FINDING OPRAH'S ROOTS** features interviews with Oprah plus further genealogical and historical research and DNA analysis. The book also includes interviews with various members of Oprah's family, including her father and cousin, the great singer Mavis Staples. Several genealogists, including Johni Cerni and Jane Ailes, explored the branches of her family tree and several scientists analyzed her DNA. The team's combined scholarship makes this book not just a user-friendly guide for recovering one's family heritage but a unique window onto history.

So what did Gates uncover about Winfrey and her family? A major discovery includes tracing her DNA all the way back to the Kpelle people of Liberia, the tribe of her first female African ancestor sold into slavery. In addition, as we meet her forebears, we realize that, like her, they were trailblazers and very much ahead of their time, most often when it came to learning and education, elements that also played a central role in Oprah's life. For example,

- great-great grandfather Constantine Winfrey, born a slave but determined to teach himself to read, and wily enough to strike a bargain with a white landowner that would forever change the fortunes of his descendants

- great-grandmother Amanda Bullocks, the self-educated sole female trustee of her community's first school at a time when it was unheard of for a woman to hold such power
- grandfather Elmore, who defied the local sheriff-and the Ku Klux Klan-by harboring Civil Rights workers

**FINDING OPRAH'S ROOTS** will not only endow readers with a new appreciation for the key contributions made by history's unsung, but also equip them with the tools to connect to pivotal figures in their own past. A roadmap through the intricacies of public documents and online databases, the book also highlights genetic testing resources that can make it possible to know one's distant tribal roots in Africa.

Gates' account will not only inspire with the stories of Oprah Winfrey's history, but it will help readers to connect to their own pasts, forging a sense of connection and belonging--indeed, the sense of "roots," as Alex Haley famously put it--that can best be found by unearthing your own family tree. In fact, one could say it's "Roots" for the 21st century.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR., is the Director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research and holder of the distinguished title of the Alphonse Fletcher, Jr. University Professor at Harvard University. In 2006, he wrote and produced the PBS documentary "African American Lives," the first documentary series to employ genealogy and science to provide an understanding of African American history. His honors and grants include a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" (1981), the George Polk Award for Social Commentary (1993), Time magazine's "25 Most Influential Americans" list (1997), a National Humanities Medal (1998), election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1999), the Jefferson Lecture (2002), and a Visiting Fellowship at the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton (2003-2004). As well as being the author of several award-winning works of literary criticism, he penned the memoir *Colored People and the Future of the Race*, co-authored with Cornel West. He has contributed to such national publications as *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *Essence*, and *The New Republic*, among many others, and been featured on NPR, CNN, *The Charlie Rose Show*, NBC's *TODAY* and more.

HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR. IS CURRENTLY  
AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS

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**By Henry Louis Gates, Jr.**

will be available on [shoppbs.org](http://shoppbs.org) and in bookstores on January 23, 2007.