**CITATION: Henry Louis Gates, Jr.**

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., or Skip, to friends and colleagues, was born in Piedmont, West Virginia on September 16, 1950. He earned his B.A. in historyfrom Yale University in 1973, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in English Literature from Clare College at the University of Cambridge in 1979. He taught at Yale (1976-85), Cornell (1985-89) and Duke (1989-91) universities.

Gates is now the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor at Harvard University, one of only 24 professors of such rank at Harvard. The rank of University Professor is reserved for the most highly accomplished members of the Harvard professoriate.

Over the past three decades Gates has emerged as a major force in the American academy. Indeed, no other individual has done more to elevate and centre the study of African American history and literature in the United States. At Harvard, he assembled the most distinguished group of African American academics in the United States, the so-called Dream Team of Kwame Anthony Appiah, Cornel West, William Julius Wilson, Larry Bobo and Jamaica Kincaid. Not since the mid-20th century New York Intellectuals has a group of intellectuals been so dominant in American public discourse.

At Harvard, Gates chaired the Department of Afro-American Studies as it expanded into the Department of African and African American Studies. He transformed an almost non-existent department with only one full professor into a top ranked, universally acclaimed department with a doctoral programme.

The author of many books of literary criticism and African American history, and the director of Harvard’s W.E.B. DuBois Institute for African and African American Research, now the Hutchins Center, Gates has been a pioneer in African - American studies for decades.

Early recognition of his path-breaking work came in the form of the MacArthur genius grant in 1981. His book *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, a landmark in African American literary studies, won the American Book Award in 1989 and cemented Gates’ position as the leading African American literary theorist of his generation. His other books include *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (1992); *The Annotated Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (2006); *Colored People*, his 1994 memoir about his childhood in West Virginia; *The Future of the Race* (with Cornel West); and *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*. In 2002, Gates discovered the first known novel by an African American woman, *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, by the fugitive slave Hannah Crafts.

Together with Appiah, Gates edited in print and digital form *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, thereby fulfilling W.E.B. Du Bois’ dream of publishing an encyclopedia of people of African descent and African American people. He also co-edited the eight-volume biographical encyclopedia, *African American Lives* (OUP, 2008). Over the past seven years he has co-edited, with David Bindman, the 10-volume *The* *Image of the Black in Western Art*, which documents representations of people of African descent since antiquity. He is also the general editor of the *Dictionary of African American Biography*, the *Dictionary of African Biography* and the *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*. Gates’ influence extends beyond the academy. A true public intellectual, he has created seventeen documentary films, including *Wonders of the African World; African American Lives; Faces of America; Black in Latin America; Black America since MLK: And Still I Rise;* and *Finding Your Roots.*

His six-part PBS documentary series, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* (2013), which he wrote, produced and hosted, earned the Emmy Award for Outstanding Historical Program - Long Form, as well as the Peabody Award, the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award, and the NAACP Image Award. Gates’ latest film is the six-hour PBS documentary, *Africa’s Great Civilizations* (2017).

His public journalism is extensive. He is a regular contributor to such leading publications as *The New Yorker,* *The New York Times* and *Time,* and serves as chairman of *TheRoot.com,* a daily online magazine he co-founded in 2008, while overseeing the Oxford African American Studies Center, the first comprehensive scholarly online resource in the field. He has also received grant funding to develop a *Finding Your Roots* curriculum to teach students science through genetics and genealogy.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and serves on a wide array of boards, including the New York Public Library, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Aspen Institute, Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Library of America, and the Brookings Institution.

He has also been on *Time*’s 25 Most Influential Americans list in 1997, *Ebony*’sPower 150 list in 2009, and *Ebony*’sPower 100 list in 2010 and 2012

The recipient of fifty-five honorary degrees and numerous prizes, Gates became the first African American scholar to be awarded the National Humanities Medal. The White House awarded him the National Medal of Honor.

When historians document the study of people of African descent, Henry Louis Gates, Jr will be remembered as one of the most influential African American scholar ever – even surpassing Du Bois in his institution building.

For his influential contributions to literary criticism, the study of African - American literature and its origins in African literary traditions, his mastery of the documentary and film forms to narrate, memoralise and archive African and African – American life and as a leading public intellectual of his time it is befitting that the University of Witwatersrand bestow on Henry Louis ‘Skip’ Gates an Honorary Doctorate degree.