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Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ***Series Overview and Episode Descriptions***

Series Overview

Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is the 12th and latest series from the renowned cultural critic and Harvard scholar. In this 10-part series, Professor Gates continues the quest he begun in *African American Lives 1* and *2* and *Faces of America* delving into the genealogy and genetics of an all new group of famous Americans. The series combines history and science in a fascinating exploration of race, family, and identity in today's America. Each hour features a different grouping of celebrity guests, who are bound together by an intimate, sometimes hidden link, whether it be as old friends, through long-lost relatives, or even through a common ancestral past. The 25 guests featured in the series are: **Kevin Bacon, Cory Booker, Angela Buchdahl, Geoffrey Canada, Linda Chavez, Margaret Cho, Harry Connick, Jr., Margaret Cooper, Robert Downey, Jr., Adrian Grenier, Sanjay Gupta, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Samuel L. Jackson, John Legend, John Lewis, Branford**

Marsalis, Yasir Qadhi, Condoleezza Rice, Michelle Rodriguez, Kyra Sedgwick, Ruth Simmons, Martha Stewart, Wanda Sykes, Barbara Walters and Rick Warren.

***Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.*, premieres nationally Sundays, March 25 – May 20 at 8 pm ET on PBS (check local listings). (Note: program one and two are scheduled on Sunday, March 25 from 8-9 pm and 9-10 pm respectively.)**

Episode Descriptions

Episode 1:

Guests: Harry Connick, Jr. and Branford Marsalis, Sunday, March 25, 8-9 pm

Their European immigrant ancestors blazed unconventional trails in America, from capturing British ships for the American Revolution to crossing racial barriers in slave-era Louisiana. Generations later, as children growing up in New Orleans, Harry Connick, Jr. and Branford Marsalis found a deep and abiding friendship through their common love of jazz and of the city itself. In this hour, we trace the turbulent and contradictory history of the city of New Orleans through the family stories of these two fascinating men.

Episode 2:

Guests: Cory Booker and John Lewis, Sunday, March 25, 9-10 pm

In this episode, we feature two African American politicians from different generations and opposite backgrounds. John Lewis grew up in a sharecropping family in rural Georgia, while Cory Booker was raised in an affluent, all-white New Jersey suburb. Although both men have devoted their lives to the betterment of African-American people, neither of them knows much about their own ancestors. In this episode, we introduce Booker to his white great-grandfather, a man he never knew, and move Lewis to tears over the extraordinary ambitions and accomplishments of his slave ancestors.

Episode 3:

Guests: Barbara Walters and Geoffrey Canada, Sunday, April 1, 8-9 pm

What's in a name? Well, a lot, at least when it comes to piecing together your family history. For former slaves, choosing a last name was one of their first acts of freedom. For Jewish immigrants, it was a way to fit in their new country. Whatever the reason for a name change, it can make the process of learning about one's ancestors difficult, if not impossible. In this episode, we unearth missing links in the family histories of media legend Barbara Walters and educational superstar Geoffrey Canada. Walters did not know her father's real last name. Canada did not know the name of his grandfather. Both of them had been unable to access their history...until now.

Episode 4:**Guests: Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick, Sunday, April 8, 8-9 pm**

What do Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick have in common? They are both famous actors and both descend from prominent American families that have been in this country since its inception. But they share something else, too: both had ancestors who were early opponents of slavery. Bacon's Quaker ancestors repudiated slavery long before the rest of the country, in 1780. And Sedgwick's ancestor Theodore Sedgwick argued the freedom case of Elizabeth Freeman, also known as "Mumbet," in 1781 -- which helped bring an end to slavery in Massachusetts. We reveal this fact – and many others – to Sedgwick and Bacon in this episode, and learn quite a bit about slavery in the North in the process.

Episode 5:**Guests: Angela Buchdahl, Rick Warren and Yasir Qadhi, Sunday, April 15, 8-9 pm**

Pastor Rick Warren, Rabbi Angela Buchdahl and Sheik Yasir Qadhi are of three different faiths, all with complex family histories that profoundly shaped their religious beliefs. Our research of their roots unearthed a story about the spiritual foundations of this country, an unrelenting struggle to achieve our ideal of religious freedom and tolerance, but also the difficulties sometimes of holding onto one's faith and still feeling like an "authentic" American.

Episode 6:**Guests: Maggie Gyllenhaal and Robert Downey, Jr., Sunday, April 22, 8-9 pm**

Many Americans descend from a dense soup of European ethnicities; we could call them mutts, with ancestral roots across every country in Europe. Actors Robert Downey, Jr. and Maggie Gyllenhaal are textbook examples of Americans with a rich tapestry of European immigrant stories making up their family trees. We delve in to their deep American roots in early colonial communities, and we meet their Eastern European Jewish ancestors, who share almost identical migration stories. From the Mayflower to Ellis Island, we journey through centuries of immigration that shaped and built our melting pot nation.

Episode 7:**Guests: Samuel L. Jackson, Condoleezza Rice and Ruth Simmons, Sunday, April 29, 8-9 pm**

Actor Samuel L. Jackson, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Brown University President Ruth Simmons have each climbed to the pinnacle of their profession, yet each started life as a second class citizen in the Jim Crow south. In this episode we will use DNA to investigate

family mysteries: where do they come from in Africa, and who are the white men in their family trees?

Episode 8:

Guests: Sanjay Gupta, Margaret Cho and Martha Stewart, Sunday, May 6, 8-9 pm

The three guests in this episode are all children of first or second generation immigrants and share the peculiar burdens of that heritage. In an episode that crisscrosses the planet, from India to Korea to Poland, the viewer catches a glimpse of three distinct, yet oddly overlapping experiences of families leaving their homes and becoming American.

Episode 9:

Guests: John Legend, Wanda Sykes and Margaret Cooper, Sunday, May 13, 8-9 pm

Most African Americans struggle to trace their ancestors beyond Emancipation; slavery erased names and family ties with brutal efficiency. But what if you descend from the tiny handful of free black people who evaded bondage during that terrible time? Musician John Legend and comedian Wanda Sykes discover the extraordinary stories of the free black ancestors they never knew about, while Professor Gates himself and his 98-year old friend Margaret Cooper delve into the mysteries shrouding the free people of color in their family trees.

Episode 10:

Guests: and Michelle Rodriguez, Adrian Grenier and Linda Chavez, Sunday, May 20, 8-9 pm

Michelle Rodriguez, Adrian Grenier and Linda Chavez all share Spanish colonial roots, yet each views their own identity very differently. In this episode we ask what it means to be Hispanic—and find that the answer lies in the tangled histories of European, Native American and African peoples. Crisscrossing Mexico, Spain, the Caribbean, and the Southwest, Professor Gates reveals stories of ancestral Conquistadors, Indian rebels, and “Crypto-Jews” (Spanish Jews who converted to Catholicism to survive the Inquisition, yet continued to practice their religion in secret)—showing that the American experience has been shaped by people who were in the New World long before the Mayflower.