

Black in Latin America

PBS chronicles Dr. Henry Louis Gates' sojourn south of the border

By Kam Williams
Special To *The Skanner News*

When you think of slavery in the Americas, I bet you assume that more Africans were brought to the U.S. than anywhere else in this hemisphere. But truth be told, only a tiny fraction were transported to this soil, with ten times as many being taken to Brazil, and even twice as many to Cuba.

This is just one of the fascinating factoids in store for viewers of "Black in Latin America," the latest PBS special produced by Harvard's Henry Louis Gates. Professor Gates has previously hosted "African-American Lives 1 & 2," "Faces of America," "Wonders of the African World," "Oprah's Roots," "Looking for Lincoln," and "America beyond the Color Line."

A half-dozen countries serve as the focus of this four-part series, namely, Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Gates travels to each nation to talk to the locals, capturing the flavor of the present-day culture in the light of the lasting legacy of slavery. Despite having majored in Black Studies, I have to admit that I found all of the episodes extraordinarily informative.

For example, I had no idea that supposedly freedom-loving President Thomas Jefferson had not only refused to recognize Haiti after that nation declared its independence but that he derogatively referred to its emancipated inhabitants as cannibals. In terms of Cuba, I was surprised to learn of a recent return of a color-coded caste



Dr. Henry Louis Gates

system on the island, ostensibly as a consequence of an influx of dollars from lighter-skinned relatives in the United States.

Similarly, Brazil, often promoted as a post-racial utopia, is presented here as the undeserving beneficiary of a myth yet to be realized. Who knew that slavery was only abolished there in 1888? And racism is apparently ubiquitous in Peru, too, where for a pittance many blacks still pick cotton in fields on the very same plantations as did generations of their ancestors.

Dedicated to Dr. Gates' recently-deceased, beloved father (whom you may remember from "African-American Lives"), "Black in Latin America" is a must-see for anyone interested in appreciating the history

and continuing fallout of slavery South of the Border.

Excellent (4 stars)
Unrated
Running time: 240 Minutes
Distributor: PBS

"Black in Latin America" airs Tuesdays at 8 p.m. on PBS (check local listings)

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Oregon Shakespeare Festival Hosts Hip-Hop Poetry Open-Mic

May 2 poetry event part of a season-long series in Ashland

Oregon Shakespeare Festival will host a hip-hop poetry open-mic, May 2. The open-mic is the third of four free events, all scheduled for 7-9 pm Mondays at The Black Swan Theater, 15 S. Pioneer Street, Ashland. Upcoming dates are: May 2 and Oct. 10.

Newcomers and veterans of open-mic events are invited to mix and experiment, and share your writing, music and theatrical skills of any kind. There is no requirement to participate - we need appreciative people just to listen and appreciate the power of the spoken word. Admission is free.

This open mic will include special guest Khatt Taylor, who acted the role of the player queen in Hamlet as well as other roles at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Khatt has rocked poetry slams from California and Illinois to Washington and Oregon. A graduate of the University of Washington's drama school, she has written and performed several one-woman shows and worked with many companies, including Intiman in Seattle.

More information from 541-482-2111, ext. 295



Khatt Taylor

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