

SOC147
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The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross

The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross is a six-part documentary miniseries written and narrated by Harvard University Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. These six episodes convey the story of the African-American events starting with the transatlantic slave trade to the reelection and second inauguration of President Barack Obama. It takes us as viewers across five hundred years and two continents to show the journey of being an African American. It shows us the tragedies, triumphs, and contradictions of the black experience in America. It also offers a historical overview of the courage, strength, and triumphs of African Americans as they struggle to adapt and eventually adjust in a land that was not their own.

I watched this 6-hour series over the course of several days. This was an educational and learning process for me to be able to better understand a part of American history that is sometimes overlooked. The purpose of the documentary is to inform viewers of what slavery was like by providing stories of those who lived through slavery. Mainly I learned about the hardships and tragedies that African American people endured during slavery. Beginning with the first documentary, The Black Atlantic, and the three-hundred-year history of the slave trade, Professor Gates provides content in each show that is very informative and thought provoking. It allowed me to better understand their journey to obtain freedom and equality.

In all honesty, I did not know what to expect from this documentary. In high school, I learned about slavery in history classes but never to this extent and certainly not over a 500-year timeframe. Very little was mentioned of the contributions of African Americans to the founding

and building of this country. I found the entire miniseries enlightening and learned many things I never knew about the evolution of the African American people and their plight with slavery. I enjoyed how Professor Gates travels throughout the United States to take viewers through the journey of African American history. The documentary looks at different eras and the problems black Americans faced, but also the many things they accomplished as well as for example as they built roads, bridges, and factories and in doing so advanced the African American culture. Professor Gates interviews many black, prominent leaders throughout each era along with some of America's leading historians. Their knowledge and illustrative stories in each video highlighted the ways African Americans always sought to better their lives in extremely challenging and harsh situations. Also profiled were well-known, important figures such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. and Colin Powell.

I took away many lessons from watching this miniseries. *Many Rivers to Cross* teaches us more than just black African American history. It definitely expanded my knowledge as it explored the black identity and what it truly means to be an African American in the United States today. I found it to be a historically accurate and impartial view on the shaping of America due to slavery. I found it interesting that the Professor Gates was able to trace the family tree of even one specific woman from her being kidnapped and enslaved in Africa to her current descendants. It helped me to put events I've heard about in school and life into chronological order and perspective about the struggle and adversity of African Americans, the problems they faced but also the many things they accomplished as well.

In summary, this miniseries was highly informative and eye opening. I would encourage the documentary to be viewed by everyone because it really brought out a lot of good information regarding the struggles endured and the progress achieved by African Americans. It really is an outstanding presentation of the historical and cultural view of the African American journey from the 1500's to 2013.