

To
Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Dear Sir:

Africa Update Vol VII, Issue 1 (Winter 2000) publish the Debate between Mazrui and yourself. In the same edition, there is a short history about an African Prince that come to live in Brazil, in early years of 20th Century. The Prince's story it is published just bellow your debate. It has lasted one full year since Gloria Emeagwali as informed me that the short story I'sent was published.

Then, reading you debate, I thought I could collaborate somehow, since I'm Afro-Brazilian and I have been in Africa more than fifty times. So, I have forwarded to Gloria the following comment, but it seems will not be published. I'll appreciate if you acknowledge the receipt of this message.

"Dear Gloria:

Only now I've read my research note on your e-magazine The Africa Update. I do hope, the following comments, will not be damaged or delayed by no bug or "secret service" as well.

My research, it seems to me, is like the base for the building that is the heavy discussion between Ali A. Mazrui, director of Institute of Global Cultural Studies, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. I mean by "base" a mere structural concept, since their strong, and many worded work is displayed above the few lines of my "The Mysterious African Prince."

The reason why I'm writing these lines is because I found few, but relevant connections with Professor Gates, Jr. Like him, I'm *not an historian, an archeologist, or an anthropologist*, but on my own case, a lawyer. Like him, I've been in Africa more than fifty times, in Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Kenya. El Mina Castle gives me not the real impression that I've been there often, instead gives to me the real impression that I (or my great- grandfathers) was sent to Brazil expelled through El Mina's no return gate. So when professor Muzrui states: "To my astonishment when watching 'Wonders of the African World,' I heard a Ghanaian tourist guide at a slave fort (Elmina) tell African-American tourists that they were sold into slavery by Africans. Is this the policy of the Ghanaian government to tell tourists that it was not the white man but the Black man who was responsible for the Atlantic slave system? If not, why is not the guide sacked? He was saying to African Americans "We Ghanaians sold you!" — I recall not the poor boy, probably illiterate, working for pennies, and for the support of his family, as tourist guide, but I recall professor Adu Boahen, well-known scholar all over the World. In his book, "Topics in West African History," he states: *How, were all these numerous unfortunate Africans enslaved and purchased? African scholars and politicians today must be honest and admit that the enslavement and sale of the Africans from the seventeenth century onwards were done by the Africans themselves, especially the coastal kings and their elders, and that very few Europeans actually ever marched inland and Captured slaves themselves. Africans became enslaved in four main ways: first, criminals sold by the chiefs as punishment; secondly, free Africans obtained from raids by African and a few European gangs; thirdly, domestic slaves resold; and fourthly, prisoners of war. Though punishment of malefactors by selling them as slaves was not new in Africa, with the beginning of the slave trade this practice became grossly abused. Many kings formed the habit of punishing any and every offence by enslaving the amused. Again, as some historians have recently pointed out, 'subversive plots against the local government became surprisingly common in sea-coast towns off which the slavers, dropped anchor. The king almost always discovered a number of dangerous conspirators, and they naturally had to be sold. To eliminate all possible danger, the king else sold the conspirators' wives, their children and their brothers.' Debtors were also sold. But the greatest sources of the supply of slaves were raids conducted for the sole purpose of catching men for sale and,*

above all, inter-tribal and inter-state were which produced thousands of war captives, most of whom found their way into the New World. Captain John Hall who voyaged to Africa in 1772 and 1776 reports that a, appearance of a slave ship at Old Calabar was the signal for the Africans to go upstream in their war canoes, and they usually returned two to three weeks later with their canoes full of slaves."

Karl Polanyi, in his book "Dahomey and the Slave Trade – An Analysis of an Archaic Economy," pg. 143, says: *"The native trade goods were gold, salves, pepper, ivory, native cloths . . . Europeans trade goods were guns and powder, brandy, iron bars, occasionally coppers . . . "*

Many Nigerians and Dahomeans know the Brazilian quarters both in Lagos and Porto Novo, known marks of the Brazilian presence in both Atlantic traffic of slaves and in those two important spots of trade. Large and sophisticated houses, at the time, were the display of riches by wealthy Brazilian Negroes and Mulattoes or their descendants. On this subject probably all involved in this debate know the learned study displayed in Pierre Verger's book, "Trade relations between the Bight of Benin and Bahia from the 17th to 19th Century."

Roland Olivier, in "The African Experience," writes: *"Fully one-third of the eleven to twelve million slaves who crossed the Atlantic between the fifteenth century and the nineteenth came from Africa south of the equator, between the Cameroon estuary and the Kunene. During the first seventy years of European contact these consisted overwhelmingly of the captives taken on the frontiers of the still expanding Kongo kingdom. By about 1560, however, the lines of communication of the Kongo armies were becoming overstretched, and neighboring peoples, such as the Mbundu to the south and the Yaka to the east, began to counter-attack, taking slaves from Kongo, which they exported down the Kwanza valley to Luanda, where Portuguese traders were already settled at the nucleus of what was to become the colony of Angola."*

When I first arrived in Ghana, January 1975, how depressed I've become hearing, not from tourist guides, but from good and learned friends I've made, something out of my imagination then. Nevertheless, as people use to say that the Brazilians are a joyful people, almost immediately I turned the historical fact in my favor saying: "I'm from the strong stock. I've overcome El Mina's no return gate. You sent me, but I'm back again." And they were noble enough to laugh, at the time.

Nevertheless, I rather prefer another end for this. Frank Yerby, famous Afro-American writer because his historic novels, wrote in 1970 "The Dahomean." The saga of a young Dahomean born to be a prince, but in a wrong time and place. Yerby built the end of his novel like this: *"But on the day that Monroe and Matthew Parks bore him away from the slave auction in that hidden inlet of Chesapeake Bay, Virginia, where the swift coasting schooner of the slave smugglers had brought him once his training was done, he sat in their wagon and said nothing at all."*

But his keen Dahomean brain was busy, sorting out the why of things very quietly in his thoughts. The only definite conclusion he came to was that the black men who sold other black men to white slavers didn't know what white men were, and couldn't even imagine how slavery in America differed from the rather gentle and indulgent variety of it practiced at home. But beyond that he found no answers. He'd seen his mother and his children murdered; his wives raped, branded, sold. There was no conception, no idea, that meant anything anymore. He had no certain knowledge that anyone he'd known and loved was left alive. He had been a man, almost a prince. Now he was a thing. A slave.

Riding in that creaking wagon, he approached the conviction that all men came to, soon, or late: that why is an unanswerable word: that there are no solutions to anything in life. And having almost reached that immense, empty, horizon-stretching, utterly barren plateau of always unacceptable truth, he was silent, making of his no answer perhaps the answer.

For silence at least has dignity."

Without passion, Professor Gates Jr. says: Need it be said that to acknowledge that Africans participated in the slave trade along with Europeans is not to exclude the horrible crimes of the latter?

Lines from the books:

Topics in West African History, Adu Bohaen -Longmans, Green and Co Ltd. - London.-

Adu Bohaen is responsible for the Volume VII, of *"General History of Africa"*, sponsored by Unesco.

Dahomey and the Slave Trade - An Analysis of an Archaic Economy- Karl Polanyi, University of Washington Press.

The Dahomean - Frank Yerby - Dell Publishing Co.Inc.

The African Experience", Roland Olivier - Icon Editions."