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CRITIQUE OF "WONDERS OF THE AFRICAN WORLD"

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One redeeming feature of the travelogue, *Wonders of the African World*, though it lacked depth, is that both black and white viewers who know little if anything about Africa would have gained some important information about the continent in the midst of trivia.

It is most unfortunate that Professor Gates missed a wonderful opportunity to present the series in a scholarly fashion. Instead, he trivialized much of the information and displayed irreverence and disrespect for what is held sacred in the various cultures. For example, when told about the Asantehene, the Chief or King of the Asante in Ghana, his retort in jest was that he was the Skipahene. Had he done his homework, he would have known that "hene" means Chief or King; that the Asantehene is revered as the King of the Asante, a people with a highly developed and respected culture. Does Professor Gates equate himself with the King of the Asante? Is he King of any kingdom? And why would he flippantly call the powerful Queen Mother the Queen Mum (a British term of endearment for a retired Queen Mother without power)? Further, he should know that the traditional dress worn by men in Ghana is not a robe, but the "Ntama" or cloth.

Professor Gates failed, if indeed, he knew, to mention that of the more than 60 forts and castles built by the Europeans, approximately thirty-six remain, some in ruins, some under reconstruction, some used as rest houses, some as government offices, others as prisons, and one, Christiansborg Castle in Accra, is the seat of the Ghana government.

Professor Gates made a mockery of some basic issues: female circumcision, different forms of slavery and he led the guides to believe that Africans were solely responsible for slavery. He took a shallow, touristy approach to his discussion of Mali as a great empire, the extraordinary architectural design of the Djenne mosques, Segou, Mopti, and the Dogon culture.

With regard to the Ark of the Covenant, why would Professor Gates sarcastically raise questions about the authenticity of the presence of the Ark and then insist on seeing it because he was a Harvard University professor? His arrogance and air of superiority were deflated by the priest whose response was: "because you're clever doesn't mean you can know."

Professor Gates was disrespectful in his dress and was obnoxious with his obsession with toilets and plumbing, vehicle breakdowns, bars, and silly nonsense in greeting people as "hello, my brother." At one point, he descended to a level of vulgarity saying he was annoyed by "Black Africans kissing the behinds of whites," a curious objection considering his personal circumstances.

Professor Gates admits that he is not an African scholar and his lack of historical knowledge of Africa was apparent throughout the TV series. Information was at its best when given by Africans. Some African scholars are sorely disappointed by the series.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the series to many of its viewers in spite of the trivialities and shallow presentation, was their discovery of a great and glorious African past with complex, highly developed ancient African civilizations. This African past is a legacy for posterity.

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