THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE AFRICAN AMERICANS: MANY RIVERS TO CROSS

WITH HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

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Introduction:

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President
The Brookings Institution

Moderator:

GLENN HUTCHINS
Vice Chair, The Brookings Institution
Chair, Hutchins Center for African and African-American Research at Harvard University

Discussants:

LOIS DICKSON RICE
Guest Scholar
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RON HASKINS
Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Center on Children and Families
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ISABEL SAWHILL
Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Center on Children and Families
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Featured Speaker:

HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.
Director, Hutchins Center for African and African-American Research and Alphonse Fletcher University Professor, Harvard University

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: A very pleasant good morning to all of you. I'm Strobe Talbott, and it is my great honor and pleasure this morning to introduce an event that I think is going to be particularly stimulating and educational.

We're going to be having a discussion about the many rivers, both literal and metaphorical, that African-Americans have crossed since their ancestors crossed the middle passage of the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to the New World in chains.

Now, this event today -- and as you'll see it'll involve real people but also some terrific stuff on the screen -- is being led by Skip Gates. And the only person in the room who is in a position to contradict what I'm about to say is Skip Gates. I would put forward the proposition that he knows more about the subject that we're going to be talking about today than just about anybody on the planet. He is a distinguished scholar. He's a spellbinding teacher, both in the classroom and in informal conversations. Like is just an ongoing seminar with Skip. He is a prolific historian, and very importantly, particularly given the mission and ethos of the Brookings Institution, he is a public intellectual, which means that his expertise, his eloquence, his moral vision, have had an impact far beyond the ivy-covered walls of academia. He is also a great friend of this institution. In fact, I can say with pride and a lot of benefit over the years that our lives have intersected going back to when we were both ink-stained wretches for the *Yale Daily News* and *Time Magazine*. He was a trustee of this institution for 24 years, and that not only meant that he was an important part of our governing

board, he was also a talent scout for our board.

Soon after I came to Brookings 12 years ago, Skip introduced me to Glenn Hutchins, who is sitting right next to him and you'll be hearing from shortly. Glenn is now a vice chair of our board, and very importantly, the chairman of our Second Century campaign. We have a centenary coming up in 2016.

And by the way, Glenn has his own passion about the subjects that we're going to be talking about. The last time I saw Skip and Glenn together was a couple of weeks ago in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the inauguration of the Hutchins Center on Africa and African-American Research at Harvard University.

We're going to proceed thus. Glenn and Skip will come up here with the panelists I'll introduce in a minute. Glenn is going to offer a couple of opening remarks, and then Skip is going to give us a little bit of background on the series that he has done for PBS. The panel is going to consist of three of my colleagues here at the Brookings Institution -- Ron Haskins, Belle Sawhill, and Lois Rice. They will lead you in a discussion of some of the key issues that are embedded in the large topic that we're looking at here today, particularly affirmative action, poverty in the black community, and the drug crisis in that community as well. There will, of course, be a chance to interact with the panelists afterwards, but now I would ask you to all join me in welcoming Skip, Glenn, and the three panelists up here to the stage.

(Applause)

MR. TALBOTT: Okay. Thank you all for coming.

MR. HUTCHINS: Thank you for waiting. Thank you for joining us.

What we're going to do today is see a few excerpts from Skip's new PBS series which premiers a week from today.

MR. GATES: Week from today.

MR. HUTCHINS: Six-part series on the history of the African-American experience. You'll tell us a little bit about what that means, how you define that. And by the way, for those of you who watch PBS, it might surprise you to know that Skip's last show on PBS last spring drew many more viewers in than Downton Abbey.

(Applause)

MR. HUTCHINS: On a subject that was considerably more important, too.

Skip, one of the things we talk about here at Brookings is having impact. We contrast that to the academy where one produces high quality work in an independent way, the way we do at Brookings, but very seldom is it really focused on having impact on the world around us. You have, over the course of your career, you have made the transition from Ph.D. in English and helping to create the field of African-American literature, to now being a public intellectual, translating what happens in the academy into ways that are accessible and relevant to the general public. Talk a little bit about that transition.

MR. GATES: Well, I have a Ph.D. I have a B.A. in History from Yale, like Strobe, and I have a Ph.D. in English Literature. But I really -- my heart

is in Africa and African-American Studies. So since I was 26, I've been a professor of Africa and African-American Studies in English, but since I was 17, I wanted to make a documentary.

What happened when I was 17? It was 1968, and Bill Cosby did a documentary called "Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strained." And I grew up three hours from here on the Potomac in the Allegheny Mountains, right near Cumberland, Maryland. All the Gates are from Cumberland. And my dad worked at the paper mill in Piedmont, West Virginia, just across the border. And we had a little black and white TV. RCA Victor black and white TV, and I watched that documentary. It was my first experience with African-American history, and I fell in love with it. So a year later I'm at Yale and I take William McFeely's Introduction to Afro-American History course. And Glenn, there were like 200 people. All the black kids at Yale took this course; right? Even during the strike. It's the only class we showed up for. But William McFeely is a white guy. And so we all would take notes. I would never do what I'm about to say, but at the end of each lecture, each lecture, somebody black would stand up and give him a hard time for being white. And they would just be very abusive and very rude. We all had big afros and dashikis and talked about how dare he teach this course. And he said he was working hard to hire a black man, but until then, shut up and take your notes and pass your exam.

So watching Cosby in this documentary and taking this Black History course, it all sort of was bubbling. In 1991, when I moved to Harvard, Henry Hampton invited me to come to the South End to the offices of Blackside.

And you all know Henry Hampton did "Eyes on the Prize." And Glenn, within an hour I realized when I left that I wanted to make documentary films. And as luck would have it, three years later I got a letter from a producer in the BBC who had seen me on a late night book talk show in England, and she said, "I'm going to make you a presenter," as they say, and the rest is history. This is my 13th documentary. And this series completes a kind of trilogy. You all remember from --

MR. HUTCHINS: I was going to ask you the next question. So --

MR. GATES: Okay.

MR. HUTCHINS: -- you're getting right at what I'm going to ask you.

MR. GATES: Okay.

MR. HUTCHINS: So tell us a little bit about this series, and then right after Skip's finished -- I don't know who's in charge of the tech here -- but as soon as he finishes with his answer, let's queue up the trailer.

MR. GATES: Great.

MR. HUTCHINS: Okay. So go ahead.

MR. GATES: You remember studying about the triangle trade for the slave trade. Africa, Latin America, North America. So I did a documentary, as you know, on the wonders of the African world. Six hours in 1998 on classical African civilization. And then three years ago I did the second leg of the triangle, which was Black and Latin America, four hour series. And this, finally, is a six-hour series. The first time a filmmaker has attempted to tell the whole story of

the African-American people since Bill Cosby in 1968. There have been over 100 documentaries, excellent documentaries like “Eyes on the Prize” or Stanley Nelson’s “Freedom Riders” or “Slavery in America,” but no one has tried to do the whole sweep. And so that’s what we’ve done. And it’s 500 years.

Every person in this room who took a Black History course started in 1619 when the first 20 Africans, who we now know were from Angola, showed up in Jamestown. In fact, they landed, we now know, at Point Comfort, and then went to Jamestown. Well, we start in 1513. We have found the first African-American. His name was Juan Garrido. He came to Florida with Ponce de Leon in search of the Fountain of Youth, and he wasn’t even a slave. And this happens to be his 500th anniversary. So it’s the 50th anniversary of the March, 150th anniversary of the Emancipation, and the 500th anniversary, half a millennium ago, the first African-American as it were, landed, set foot in Florida. And we trace the arc from this free black man, who came from Spain, all the way to the reelection and inauguration of Barack Hussein Obama.

MR. HUTCHINS: So let’s queue it up.

MR. GATES: The first clip is affirmative action.

MR. HUTCHINS: No. No, this is going to be the trailer.

MR. GATES: Oh, the trailer. Great.

MR. HUTCHINS: We’ll do affirmative action after that.

(Video plays)

(Applause)

MR. HUTCHINS: Can’t wait. A week from tomorrow night.

MR. GATES: Thank you.

MR. HUTCHINS: Of course, if anybody wants to drop by my house we already have the first hour.

MR. GATES: For a small fee.

MR. HUTCHINS: Not that small.

The first clip we're going to see is about affirmative action.

So, Skip, I want to ask you a direct question about this. Were you helped by affirmative action?

MR. GATES: The class of '66 at Yale had six black men to graduate. The class that entered with me had 96. What, was there a genetic blip in the race and all of a sudden there are 90 smart black people who hadn't existed before? I never would have gotten in without affirmative action. But what did that mean? Affirmative action meant that we were allowed to compete with white -- well, Yale was all male until I went there, but we were allowed for the first time to compete on a more or less level playing field with white kids. Before, there was a strict quota. The class of '66 had six. The class of '65 had six. The class of '64 had six. So it opened it up and gave us a chance through merit to be admitted. That's what affirmative action was. People misunderstand how affirmative action was born, and it's traduced by the cliché of people not qualified being allowed -- being given something they don't deserve. No. We had lots of qualified black people who could have gone to Yale but they couldn't get in because of this quota. It lifted the quota. It probably put on a new quota, 96.

MR. HUTCHINS: But they didn't know what they were getting

going.

MR. GATES: But there was a class element, too, Glenn, that if you look at the biographies of those six black guys who graduated, one's father was a doctor, one was a lawyer, one was a dentist, one was an undertaker -- which puts you in the black upper middle class; right? My dad worked two jobs for 37 years, as you know -- the paper mill in the daytime, a janitor in the evening. So I would have gone to college like everybody in my family did, but I probably wouldn't have been allowed in the old days of segregation even to apply to Yale because you couldn't just show up if you were black. All those pioneers integrating those civil rights, like Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Hamilton Holmes, Ruby Bridges. They were all prescreened. They were not too dark. They had certain grades of hair. They spoke in proper English. You know, you couldn't just show up.

MR. HUTCHINS: Interesting.

MR. GATES: You had to be approved. These are the secrets of the race. And so I wouldn't have had the class profile. So it was both class and race.

MR. HUTCHINS: We'll come back to that economic -- by class, you mean economics primarily --

MR. GATES: Yes.

MR. HUTCHINS: We'll come back to that afterwards.

Let's see the clip about affirmative action and then we'll discuss some of the issues you've just raised.

(Video plays)

MR. HUTCHINS: Lois, I think this might even be today, the Supreme Court is considering a new affirmative action case from Michigan, and a whole bunch of issues are being raised. Notably, should affirmative action be a permanent feature of the American sort of legal landscape or should it be time bound? I think Sandra Day O'Connor said 25 years would be enough. Is it -- the issue that Skip just raised, is it about race or is it about economics? Why should the children of black elite be given preferences over people who aren't of that race but have much worse economic circumstances? Can you address these issues a little bit?

MS. RICE: I think affirmative action is a matter of race, as well as economics, but they're also synonymous very often. In fact, always. And I could give you a little bit of my own experience.

I was one of three-only women, black women, in my class at Radcliff in 1954.

MR. HUDGINS: Where Lois and I went to school, Yale is a four-letter word, by the way.

MS. RICE: And my -- I have a son who is a graduate of Yale, and my late husband was a prominent Yalee, who you may have known.

MR. HUTCHINS: Good man.

MS. RICE: Alfred Fitt.

SPEAKER: Lois, you might want to use the other mic.

MS. RICE: Thank you, sorry.

MR. HUTCHINS: She was saying how superior Yale is to Harvard. Anyway, keep going.

(Laughter)

MS. RICE: I'm very pleased with Yale. I have been all along. And Alfred had two sons, who went to Yale, and he's no longer living but his one and only grandson has been admitted as a freshman at Yale.

MR. HUTCHINS: Great.

MS. RICE: And my son, John Rice, is now in Yale Corporation.

MR. HUTCHINS: Oh, amazing.

MS. RICE: So I have a great affinity for Yale, as well as Harvard.

But it was not easy at Radcliff over those days. First of all, I think we tried very hard, the three of us, to sort of stay apart from each other. If we were working down Brattle Street in Cambridge, we would sort of cross when one of us would cross over to the other side of the street. And we were very conscious about being a small number.

MR. HUTCHINS: So you wouldn't Jim Crow yourselves?

MS. RICE: Absolutely.

MR. HUTCHINS: As we used to put it.

MS. RICE: Absolutely.

MR. HUTCHINS: Do you want some water?

MS. RICE: Thank you.

But I also grew up in a very probably different setting from you and others. I grew up in Portland, Maine.

MR. HUTCHINS: Oh, my goodness. Well known center of African-American culture.

MS. RICE: That's right.

(Laughter)

MS. RICE: The state of Maine then, when I was in high school, and even today, has a black population leaving maybe some of the interesting African who have recently moved to certain centers in Maine, less than one-tenth of one percent. And I summer in Maine, still, and I sort of almost search to see the next black face in the community of Camden where I live.

But there were some issues indeed in Cambridge. I had had an illness of a rheumatic heart, and it was felt that I needed a single room, and because single rooms were more expensive than double rooms, I had a scholarship, and so therefore, they put me automatically in a double room with another black -- one of the other two black students. The third was Ralph Bunche's daughter, so they really couldn't quite make any quick changes where she was concerned. So I gained the position of being in the top bunk of this double room.

And then I was distressed that they had segregated rooming. And I had one of my brothers, who had gotten his Ph.D. in English Literature from Harvard, had been a teaching assistant in English Literature. He was a militant scholar. And he's Professor J. B. Munn, who was a very outstanding man and person. Had a beautiful house on Brattle Street, right behind the Radcliff campus. And he frequently brought in students, mostly Harvard men, to study

and use his library at his magnificent house. So I was invited to go and join that crowd. And I was the first woman that they had ever permitted to be one of the Munn students. And so I was very privileged with that and had a wonderful experience. And J. B. Munn was concerned about this rooming assignment and invited me therefore to come and stay at his house, which was a wonderful mansion on Brattle Street.

Glenn, you probably know what that whole area is.

MR. HUTCHINS: Sure.

MS. RICE: So anyway, it took four years later until the rooming pattern at Radcliff was broken up and the president of Radcliff said after Professor Munn visited him, this is nothing really unusual. We've always put Catholic girls with Catholic girls and Jewish girls with Jewish girls, and black girls with black girls. I guess we were colored in those days.

So, but growing up in Portland was an unusual experience, and my parents were Jamaican immigrants to New England, and had five children, four sons. The oldest son was 21 when I was born and a senior at Bowden. My parents were the first people to ever have four sons graduate from Bowden. And there were no scholarships and my father never heard of a scholarship until the third son got a statement scholarship. But it was an interesting experience being black in that community. And there were a lot of things that were very equal and a lot of things that were very tense. And my parents always had a motto, which was, "Don't ever try to use race as an excuse, nor as an advantage." And we grew up with that as sort of a creed within our community and within our home.

MR. HUTCHINS: So you were pre-affirmative action?

MS. RICE: Pre-affirmative action.

MR. HUTCHINS: Belle, you've studied a whole broad range of subjects, but one which is education. Can you talk a little bit about the interaction between the roles of affirmative action in education?

MS. SAWHILL: I can, but let me say for starters that I think these personal stories are very important for people to hear. Skip's story, Lois's story. You know, we're all old up here, except for you, Glenn, and one of the things --

MR. HUTCHINS: I'm going to stay next to you, Belle. I've always enjoyed --

MS. SAWHILL: A lot of bad things about being old, but one of the good things is you have a memory of this earlier era, not going back as you have, Skip, obviously, historically, but at least going back to before a lot of people, younger people can remember. And you have a strong sense of how different life was for African-Americans.

I was teaching at Howard University in 1968. For those of you who don't know or don't remember, 1968 was the year that we had big riots here in Washington, D.C. I mean, serious riots with national guardsmen on almost every corner. And my students were all African-American. I was the only white person on the faculty. I was a lowly lecturer. I was still in graduate school. And my students were constantly talking about social injustice. They were participating in these riots. They were protesting, and they were protesting both in the university and in the city at large. And I had them write about their

experiences on their final exams, and I saved those exams for many years until, unfortunately, during a move, they got thrown out because they were historical documents. But I just had to mention that I think that one of the good things about this documentary is going to be that there are a whole lot of people in America, younger people particularly, who don't know this history, don't know what it used to be like, and therefore, need to see this kind of a historical piece.

Education. I mean, I think education is critical, and this Supreme Court case, of course, is about affirmative action in higher education. We thought it was for the settled issue was my understanding from the last case that went to the Supreme Court; that diversity is a legitimate goal for a university to have, and now we have two appeals courts that have taken opposite positions on whether a state is allowed to ban affirmative education in higher education.

MR. HUTCHINS: Now, in Michigan, there's a referendum that was passed; right?

MS. SAWHILL: Right.

MR. HUTCHINS: That created either a law or constitutional amendment that said that you can't use racial preferences.

MS. SAWHILL: Right. Right.

So I believe the court is going to be considering this today. I might be wrong. Does anybody out there know? People are nodding. Yes. So this is a very timely period.

I think the questions you just raised about affirmative action are exactly the ones we should be debating. You know, how long? Do we need

affirmative action? I hope not forever. And secondly, what about class versus race.

If I can tell another personal story, I was testifying before the Civil Rights Commission back in I think it was the 1970s, and I was asked a question by one of the commissioners, "Suppose you were given a choice as a university administrator between a white guy whose father was a miner in Appalachia versus a black kid whose father was a doctor in New York, what would you do?" And at that time I answered -- I remember this well -- that I would choose the doctor's son because there were not enough role models for younger black Americans in positions of influence and power, really your point, I think.

I'm not sure I would answer it the same way now. I'm very troubled about the fact --

MR. HUTCHINS: Is that because of where we are today or do you think your answer was wrong given the circumstances?

MS. SAWHILL: No, I think my answer was right back then. I'm just saying that things have changed. First of all, you know, African-Americans have made quite a bit of progress. Not enough. And secondly, we have a really sharply growing class divide in our society. And finally, as Lois and Skip have both said, and you as well, I think, the two are very conflated. I mean, the African-Americans that are getting left behind tend to be on the lower part of our social and economic structure, and they're the ones that I think we should be worrying about the most. So that's my --

MR. HUTCHINS: Ron, class or race?

MR. HASKINS: I would add just a couple things here. I hate to be Darth Vader, but this has been really a very divisive issue in American society and the feelings run very high.

MR. HUTCHINS: You mean broadly affirmative action?

MR. HASKINS: Yeah, broadly affirmative action because a lot of people, like in the Michigan case -- the first Michigan case -- where Sandra Day O'Connor made her famous statement about "we won't need to do this in 25 years," which in itself implies that the Supreme Court realized there's something amiss here. This is not necessarily the way we ought to do things, but the advantages it will bring outweigh the disadvantages. So I think that's the first theme of affirmative action; that we really were a separate society full of racists, especially in the South. Just like *Brown v. Board of Education*, the government had to do something. It would have taken -- we'd still be integrating lunch counters if it hadn't been for government, I think. So I think generally it was a wise thing to do and it has had a major impact, and now I think there's a psychological -- I bet everybody in the audience feels, or most of you do, if you're in an organization and you walk in a room and it's all a bunch of white people, you start looking around thinking, you know, what's going on here? This is not the way it's supposed to be. It's just not the way it's supposed to be. And I don't think a guy like me -- I'm 70 years old -- would have those feelings if it hadn't been for the fact that I went to many institutions, including business and military and education, that were basically forced to integrate. And they're investigated, too. They can come before the EEOC and have problems. So I think that part

has been a success.

But the Sandra Day O'Connor comment about -- as many of you probably remember -- "we won't need to do this in 25 years" is really an issue. And it doesn't seem to me that we're really stepping away from this because it hasn't worked as well as it might and as well as we wanted it to and there's still discrimination. So I think affirmative action will probably be -- I'm not sure what's going to happen in the Supreme Court today, but it's going to be a part of our culture for many years to come, I think. So it'll remain controversial.

MR. HUTCHINS: So let's move on to the next clip because I think it ties into the discussion we just had. This clip, Skip, talks about the emergence of a black upper middle class, kind of as you've put it, and the success associated with that but also the complexities associated with it as well; correct?

MR. GATES: Right.

MR. HUTCHINS: Go ahead. Tell us a little bit about it.

MR. GATES: Well, later in this episode, which is the final episode, the sixth episode, called "A More Perfect Union," and we use the Cosby Show to demonstrate how a new vision in blackness became an essential part of mainstream American popular culture in the 1980s. So let's take a look.

(Video plays)

MR. HUTCHINS: So, Skip, you told me that the black upper middle class has increased by a factor of four since the Civil Rights Movement.

MR. GATES: Right. Since Dr. King was killed, '68.

MR. HUTCHINS: Since Dr. King was killed, 1968. But, Belle,

you've reminded me over the years that I've known you that many other outcomes in the African-American community have gone the other way -- poverty, incarceration, teenage pregnancies, educational outcomes, et cetera -- and you or others have warned about the potential for the emergence of a permanent underclass. Talk a little bit about how that dichotomy -- how we understand that and what we might be able to do about it.

MS. SAWHILL: Well, I think everybody knows that the data don't look good. I mean, there's still these racial gaps in just about any indicator you can look at. One of the things that we're doing from a research perspective here at Brookings now, which I think is interesting and a little bit of a new twist on it is we're looking at people's lifecycle trajectories. We're looking at mobility over the lifecycle and we're looking at that amongst other ways by race. And I think many of you got a handout that has a lot of boring data on it. You don't have to look at it. I'm not going to talk about it. You can look at it at your leisure --

MR. HUTCHINS: You're not going to give us a test?

MS. SAWHILL: But I will tell you a couple of bottom lines on it. Yeah.

MR. HUTCHINS: We can keep the blue books ourselves this time.

MS. SAWHILL: Right. Right.

One of the metrics that we look at in this new work -- we call this the Social Genome Model. That's just a fancy name for looking at whether people are climbing the ladder or not over there between childhood and

adulthood. And we look at how many people are what we call middle class by middle age. Middle age is 40 and middle class is about $68,000 a year.

MR. HUTCHINS: Family of four?

MS. SAWHILL: Roughly, family of four. Or typical size family. It's a little smaller.

Anyway, for African-Americans that figure is 28 percent. For whites it's twice that high. So there's a huge gap there. The data that we use are children who primarily were born in the 1980s, some in the 1990s, and so this is not a really -- this is not today's children but it's not a really old cohort either.

The other thing we looked at is suppose you have achieved this middle class or upper middle class state as an African-American. What are the chances that your children will continue to climb the ladder or will they fall back? And how does that break out by race? And the depressing finding there is that there is a lot more falling back amongst African-Americans than there is amongst whites, even after you've achieved this middle class status. So for various reasons that we could speculate about and have written a little bit about there are some kind of mechanisms that are keeping whites in a privileged situation that are not keeping blacks there.

My colleague, Richard Reeves, is doing a lot of work now on what he calls the "glass floor." If you think about a privileged white at Harvard or Yale, their child is going to have a leg up in going there. They're going to get the internships. They're going to have the connections to get the good jobs. African-Americans don't have as many of those connections yet, so there is a difference

in mobility. But that's probably to give you a little bit of a flavor of that work.

MR. HUTCHINS: So, Ron, you've worked a little bit on this mobility project as well with Belle, but you've also spent a fair amount of time over the years on welfare, both pre- and post-reform. And there's a whole body of literature and political belief about the connections between welfare and this set of issues we've been talking about.

MR. HASKINS: Right.

MR. HUTCHINS: Can you talk a little bit about that?

MR. HASKINS: Yes. I think this illustrates a point that Belle was hinting at, which is the importance of individual decisions. We tend to focus on society and all the problems with our laws and institutions and so forth, but individuals make decisions that really reverberate in their future and shape their future to a large extent, so this case of welfare, for years if you did -- we had something like half of single black women were on welfare, had been on welfare. Other races are likely to be on welfare as well but not quite as likely as blacks. And if you interviewed them they would always say that they wanted to work. They wished they could work. So finally, Congress passed a law that said, okay, you have to work, and if you don't, we're going to take your benefits away. Or at least you have to prepare for work.

MR. HUTCHINS: This was the Clinton administration?

MR. HASKINS: Clinton. The bill was signed --

MR. HUTCHINS: Welfare to Work.

MR. HASKINS: The bill is sharply different than Obamacare. The

bill was signed by half -- was approved by half the democrats on the hill and signed by a democratic president. So there's no question it's a highly bipartisan bill, and very tough decisions about using sanctions and so forth.

So what happened? Well, never married mothers, the most disadvantaged and most likely to be black, the least likely to have education, had a 40 percent increase in their work rates in the next four years --

MR. HUTCHINS: Their birth rate?

MS. SAWHILL: Employment rates.

MR. HASKINS: There's nothing like that in Census Bureau records. Okay? And the next thing that happened was that poverty among single parent families, which is five times or so as high as among married couple families, and poverty among black children plummeted and both reached their lowest level ever, and it was because the mothers worked. They made the decision that they're going to go along with this, they're going to work just like they wanted to, so if we had more policies that really expected individual responsibility and people to make better decisions and then they did it, it would have a huge impact and these data that Belle is talking about that indicates inequality and separation between the races, and Hispanics as well, would change dramatically. And in fact, I'd go far enough to say until these decisions about having babies, getting married, and work change, we're not going to make great progress.

MR. HUTCHINS: So, Lois, do you see that issue the same way?

MS. RICE: Yes and no.

MR. HUTCHINS: Focus on the no part.

(Laughter)

MR. HUTCHINS: Tell whatever you'd like. I'd just like to hear a different point of view if you have one.

MS. SAWHILL: Controversy up here.

MS. RICE: I applaud what Bill Clinton did, even though there were a lot of people who were very opposed to that.

MR. HUTCHINS: Marian Wright Edelman's husband quit over it.

MS. RICE: I know. That's true. I'm very close to them so I know all about that.

But I think it's going to be a slower cycle, a slower period of time where we can actually say that some of these policies have made a great difference and I think the work part of the Clinton era has proved to be quite successful, but I don't think we can translate it into every other area of social policy.

MR. HUTCHINS: So you're suggesting some of the problems that were -- I'm not going to say they were easy to solve but the easiest to address have been addressed and now we're getting to the heart of the problems.

MS. RICE: I'm not saying all of them have but certainly some have.

MR. HUTCHINS: Yeah. And now we're getting to kind of longer term, more difficult problems to get after.

MS. RICE: I think there's a work ethic now in food stamps, is

there not?

MR. HUTCHINS: I don't know.

MR. HASKINS: Yes, there is. And republicans have proposed to greatly strengthen it. In fact, I think even a lot of republicans feel that provision might go too far, which is extremely unfortunate. We already have work requirements in food stamps but they're not really observed. And we should have work requirements. And so republicans, I think, in this case went too far. I'm referring to the bill that passed on the House, not the Senate. It'll never become law but, you know, you need to be moderate about these policies and do it in a way that people can actually do it and they have escape hatches and so forth, all of which were in the welfare reform bill. You can't just come through there with a club and say there are no exceptions. You have to work or you lose your benefits.

MR. HUTCHINS: Skip.

MR. GATES: I'm very concerned about that it's something that we don't often talk about but the class divide, the divide in opportunity and wealth within the African-American community because the statistics that Glenn cited at the top, the black upper middle class has quadrupled since '68 but the percentage of black children living at or beneath the poverty line is almost identical to what it was, mid-30 percent when Dr. King died. It was at the end of the 30 percents in 1968.

So that means we have two nations, both black, so there's a wealth gap between black and white and there's a wealth gap between black and

black. And affirmative action, Frank's father worked at Boeing in Seattle. My dad worked at --

MR. HUTCHINS: Frank Raines, here in the front row.

MR. GATES: Frank Raines. He went to Harvard; I went to Yale.

Affirmative action was a class escalator for us, and now affirmative action is how my kids, who were born in Yale-New Haven Hospital are in the upper middle class. We are perpetuating our class status through affirmative action. So rather than it going up like this, it's going up like that. I would even say my kids don't need affirmative action. I would rather, going back to your example, I want the poor black kid from Appalachia -- it would be me -- to get in, not the son of the doctor in New York who was black. I mean, we need to expand the black middle class, and one way to do it is through affirmative action and making decisions like that. I know it's vastly more complicated because the traditional way of expanding the middle class was through factories. You go from the no class to working class, working class to the middle class, but all those jobs went south of the border and then to China or India or wherever they are.

MR. HUTCHINS: In technology.

MR. GATES: So that whole mechanism is gone. But we need to figure out how -- right now we have the class divide within the black communities in stasis and we need to figure out how to grow it.

MR. HUTCHINS: So let's move on. We're going to run out of time. I apologize for skipping over some very big subjects, dealing with them not in a superficial but in a way that doesn't allow us to dig into them as much as

they merit.

MS. SAWHILL: Nuggets.

MR. HUTCHINS: Nuggets, yes. Thank you.

The next clip, it was interesting because it reminded me of something which I had forgotten about which is in 1972 there was a black political convention held in Gary, Indiana, which was surprising to many people who were kind of involved in it, and it was a memory that I had missed, had forgotten. So, Skip, tell us a little about that.

MR. GATES: It brought together all the different stripes of the black ideological community. You'll see Amiri Baraka, the head of the Black Arts Movement, with Maulana Karenga, all the way -- you'll see a young Jesse Jackson, who makes a speech with a surprising end, and you'll see Vernon Jordan reflecting on it. The head of the NAACP refused to go because it was too radical. They had Panthers there. They had Marxists there. But Vernon went. Vernon was the head of the National Urban League. And it ends with them realizing that all of the goals of the Civil Rights Movement have been realized. The dismantling of de jure segregation, and nevertheless, there is a class divide within the race. And Jesse ends by striking an economic note.

MR. HUTCHINS: Let's roll this final clip.

(Video plays)

MR. HUTCHINS: So this past summer my 93-year-old mother insisted -- she didn't ask, she insisted -- that Skip and I take her to the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington where she had been as a 43-year-old

from Virginia 50 years earlier. And we were reminded, and she scolded us for not remembering, that it was about jobs. And you hear again in this it's about economic opportunity and equality.

Lois, why is it that we keep forgetting in the dialogue about the economic dimension of all these issues we've been talking about?

MS. RICE: I don't know if it's very necessarily that deliberate an omission but it occurs. There's no question about it. And I think also it's very much related to the quest that a lot of us have made to equalize educational opportunities even more than sort of jobs, core jobs. And there's a need in both areas. There's no question about it.

MR. HUTCHINS: And Ron, you caught, and I missed sort of the reference in Jesse Jackson's last comment, the issue of reparations.

MR. HASKINS: Right.

The issue of reparations has no future in Washington; that's for sure. We can't even pass a budget. Reparations, you drive a stake in the middle of Congress which already has several stakes, so there's no future for reparations, that's for sure.

MR. HUTCHINS: So I guess we have a few minutes left for some audience participation. I want to call first on my fellow board member. Do you want to say a little something to us? I'm sorry, Vicky. Do you want to comment -- do you have a question or a comment on what we've been talking about today? I was told you were warned in advance. I apologize if you weren't. My apologies.

VICKY: Is this working?

No, I wasn't warned in advance, but I find this absolutely fascinating, and I really look forward to seeing the film and learning. And I think that I love the part with Vernon Jordan. He's so fair about things, and "just because we're there doesn't mean we agree" is a very typical perspective for him and a very wise one, I think. This is wonderful.

Sorry I didn't have a prepared question.

MR. HUTCHINS: That's quite all right.

MR. GATES: You can praise the series anytime you want.

MR. HUTCHINS: Exactly. Any questions? Right here. And then we'll go back on the aisle back there.

MR. WARFINI: Thank you. Mike Warfini.

I know this is an American-centric topic. Are there any international models that we can glean any helpful best practices from, whether it's Great Britain or Canada, that might apply to this situation?

MR. HUTCHINS: That's an interesting question.

So I'll ask the question a different way. We had a symposium this summer up on Martha's Vineyard and we talked about how divided America is as a country on a bunch of these dimensions still. This was not long after the Trayvon Martin decision this past summer. And the question which you and I talked about when we left there is is there any heterogeneous country in the world that is less divided than America is?

MR. GATES: And we couldn't think of it.

MR. HUTCHINS: We couldn't think of one.

MR. GATES: There's not another country -- I mean, the black community is a nation within a nation. Martin Delaney defined it that way in 1852, and it is. There are more African-Americans than Canadians. So we never think about it that way. But it's a country. So finding an analog when you have this entrenched minority, which was brought here unwillingly, not willingly, suffered three centuries of slavery or whatever, and then essentially Jim Crow. It's hard to find an analog.

MR. HUTCHINS: So Skip taught me that during the period of the slave trade, a little bit less than 500,000 slaves were delivered to us now called the United States, and about 10 million were delivered to Latin America.

MR. GATES: Right. And it's a shock to people.

MR. HUTCHINS: It's a shock to people. More to Cuba than the United States.

MR. GATES: Twice as many to Cuba. Five million to Brazil.

MR. HUTCHINS: So the question is how about Brazil?

MR. GATES: Well, it's very divided. Do you want to -- go ahead.

MS. RICE: No. No.

MR. GATES: Well, in Brazil you have -- nobody wants to be black. They have 134 categories of blackness. It's like octoroons and quadroons on steroids. (Laughter) And if you look at -- they are fighting for affirmative action right now. I'm interviewed all the time by the Brazilian media and they want to know -- and also, universities have asked me to go there and

say how does affirmative action work. And they have just passed an affirmative action law a year ago which was upheld by the Supreme Court of Brazil. Anybody can declare themselves black. And if you're black, there is a quote for black students at the federal university and they have to meet that quota. And anybody -- you could say you're a black. I've been wondering about you anyway for a long time.

MR. HUTCHINS: We took the DNA test. Skip was very disappointed with my outcome.

On the aisle back here. The gentleman, stand up, please.

MR. GATES: White as the driven snow.

MR. HUTCHINS: And then we'll go back over here for the next question. Please.

MR. WILKINSON: Winston Wilkinson. And actually, my question is related to affirmative action.

Yesterday, I went to an event where the attorney general from Michigan talked about his case that he's going to present today to the Supreme Court, and actually, he touched on Brazil, which is actually where I live. So I want to ask this question about affirmative action. But one of the issues they put forth yesterday was that, at least in Michigan, 80 percent of the benefit of affirmative action in Michigan was going to upper middle class people. So obviously, the 20 percent was being left out. So if you had a recommendation to those preparing to help that 20 percent, what would you say? What would the ideal situation be to help that 20 percent kind of move up into the middle class

and be accepted to universities?

MR. HUTCHINS: That also gets to your mobility questions, too. So Skip, why don't you go first?

MR. GATES: Okay. For me, I would like to see an economic element included in affirmative action programs. I grew up a poor white people in the hills of West Virginia, and I do know that poverty is colorblind and there is a culture of poverty, although people don't like you to say that but there really is. The kids who graduated my high school who were pregnant were white girls and who were 18 years old and unmarried. So, and I also think it's politically savvy to build alliances. Affirmative action was born when we had guns and butter. Remember? We thought that the pie could feed infinite -- it was like the fishes and the loaves from the Bible. Now everybody is terrified. And if it looks like I have a slice of pie and I have to divide it up with everybody in this room, you all aren't going to get any. Right? People were threatened, so they demonized the other. Rise in racism. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Because I think the people are getting things unfairly.

And I think it would be savvy politically to include an economic element because that would appeal broadly across the society, I think. I don't think we can keep playing the slavery card. I think that slavery is important but I think we've beaten it to death. It's real, but you've got to move on. You know? I mean, people are tired of hearing about slavery. So I want to see things like this incorporated in the schools so we never forget slavery, but I think that we have to be more savvy politically about how we build class space alliances than we have

been.

MS. SAWHILL: I agree with that, and I want to say a couple more words about education.

MR. HUTCHINS: Please.

MS. SAWHILL: Because a lot of the problems for the group that's still at the bottom is due to poor education. That's not all it's due to but that's a huge piece of it. And we've done some interesting work here at Brookings recently. Several of our colleagues. One in the Brown Center on Education here at Brookings, and one that is part of what we call the Brookings Papers on Economic Activity. And what these papers and books are showing -- and Lois knows this well, but I have a stronger voice than you do right now -- is that there is a lot of what these papers and books call "under matching." It's a rather inelegant phrase, but what it means is that there are a lot of academically qualified African-Americans, who because they lack the connections and the knowledge and come from the kind of families that don't know how to do this very well, they're not prepared -- they're prepared academically but they're not going to the kinds of institutions that they should be going to. They're going to lesser institutions. They're going to community colleges or they're going to less prestigious four-year colleges. And this work is showing that we still have a problem here. So this goes a little bit against the, well, it's all class, because it isn't. But it's a much more nuanced problem than outright prejudice and discrimination. It has to do again with those connections, networks.

MR. HUTCHINS: We have a question over here.

MR. HASKINS: Glenn, can I interrupt?

MR. HUTCHINS: Yeah, Ron, please. And then I'm going to call on this gentleman back here and then we're going to go to Frank Raines up here in the front. And I think we're going to be done after that. I apologize.

MR. HASKINS: Okay. The schools are super important. I don't deny that. But the fact is that both low income kids and black kids, and many Hispanic kids, come to the schools at age five or six, depending on their state, already behind. And you can think of the schools as doing little more than just reinforcing the differences that they inherited from the kids' homes and communities. So it follows from that, I think, that until we do something during the preschool period with parents and with better preschool programs and more universal access, more access for low income kids and minority kids, we are not going to be able to do it with the schools alone.

MR. HUTCHINS: You think you've got to get at the root cause or get kids earlier in their lives so they can be prepared?

MR. HASKINS: Earlier in their life. Yeah, root causes.

MR. HUTCHINS: I misspoke. I misspoke. Pardon me.

MR. GATES: But we need to educate the mothers, too. If you have a 16-year-old mother --

MR. HASKINS: That's what I'm saying, home.

MR. GATES: -- who is illiterate.

MR. HASKINS: The parents and the preschool programs are the two keys.

MR. GATES: Seventy percent of all live births in the African-American community are out of wedlock, to single heads of house.

MR. HUTCHINS: Lois, did you want to --

MS. RICE: I said that in 1976 at a Howard University conference and I was absolutely booed.

MR. HUTCHINS: I bet.

MS. RICE: I was sort of telling the truth about something which nobody wanted to hear.

MR. HUTCHINS: And it's only gotten worse.

MS. RICE: It's gotten worse.

MR. HUTCHINS: Moynihan told the truth.

MS. RICE: Yeah. Yeah.

But I wanted to just --

MR. HUTCHINS: Yeah, please.

MS. RICE: -- add a little something to what Belle was saying. There were some efforts lately -- Belle, one of them you and Ron I think participated in Carolyn Hoxby's work here -- but Brookings has had a long history, believe it or not. And going back to the '60s -- I'm now displaying my age here -- but when Alice Rivlin and I, and then Clark Currow was the (inaudible), were really fighting for much broader, higher educational opportunities for poor kids and minorities, and those efforts have continued. I think a very noble new program that the College Board has just announced in the last couple of weeks -- my old organization by the way -- to try to identify high achieving black students

who take the PSAT or the SAT and make sure that they are getting materials about college admissions, vouchers which are free for admission at various colleges, and try to change this match -- this ill-matching that we've seen in the past. And I think that could be a very successful effort.

MR. HUTCHINS: So there's a gentleman in the back here and then we're going to go to Frank and I think we'll be done.

MR. GRINDSTAFF: Hugh Grindstaff.

Mr. Gates, I'm one of those poor white kids from Appalachia. But my question really is did you look into the -- since 1948 and the integration of the Armed Forces, how there has been somewhat of a black middle class that have established themselves through military training, through going to -- I mean, if you look at -- Vietnam was really when everyone got drafted and everyone had to go in and people didn't have a chance to get educated through the military in other ways. Any comments on Ben Carson's statement about Obamacare being the worst thing since slavery?

MR. GATES: Well, this is directed at me; right?

Well, Ben is an old friend of mine, but let's just say we disagree politically straight down the line. So I thought that was frankly ridiculous. I think that Ben is a brilliant -- the brilliance of Ben's acumen in neurosurgery has not manifested itself in politics. (Laughter) And I said that to his face.

In terms of the military, yeah, I think the military has been a great vehicle for African-Americans. I don't like the fact that the fighting forces are disproportionately black of people dying. That's a real problem for me. Dying in

our undeclared wars. But on the other hand it is a mechanism of social mobility for people at the bottom moving up into the middle class. I don't have any stats on it but anecdotally that seems to be true.

MR. HUTCHINS: Frank, do you want to bring us home with the last question, please? Stand up, please.

MR. RAINES: I think it's more of a cautionary comment.

MR. HUTCHINS: Please.

MR. RAINES: Because I think we have some conventional wisdom that doesn't really match up to the statistics as I understand them. I think this number is a little bit off, but a few years ago it was calculated -- there are only about 1,200, 1,300 African-Americans taking the SATs who got scores above 1,100. So all of this discussion of affirmative action and keeping poor whites out of elite schools can't be driven by those 1,100 people. What really has happened in this clash -- and I think the working class whites have been used as a battering ram -- is that it's actually upper higher income whites whose kids do not have the strongest scores who are really the ones who are being protected in this fight. This is not a fight between working class whites and blacks. All of them could be taken care of if you dealt with the question of what about the below average upper middle class white student whose parents are contributors, whose parents went there, who have these connections. That's really the struggle that goes on on a day-to-day basis if you look at an admissions office when they're making these kinds of decisions. And if Harvard and Yale each want to have a critical mass, we've got to have at least 100 to

have a critical mass, it doesn't leave a lot of other kids as you go down the admissions route.

And so you see these fights come up. They come up in the elite schools. You don't see battles over affirmative action going on in Western Michigan University. It's the University of Michigan that has a limited number of spaces and a lot of those spaces are not being taken up by African-Americans or Hispanics; they're being taken up by sort of average students who had other things going for them as they're being admitted.

The other point on affirmative action, and having run a big company and tried very hard to make sure we had women and minorities in management positions, the lesson we learned, it wasn't about credentials. You can find credentials all over the place. In reality, and I think the research bears this out, there's a wide range around who can be successful. We always talk about averages, but it turns out that a number of people who come in with credentials below average will succeed more often than you expect and a lot of people who come in with credentials above average will fail a lot more often than you expect.

So the real divider is opportunity. Who gets a chance to fail? Who gets the opportunity to be in the game and to see whether or not you can succeed and be subject to being eliminated if you don't succeed? My view was I'd rather take the chance on someone who might come in on whatever the standard of merit. They may be below, but it turned out lots of them succeeded. Not all of them. Maybe 40 percent did. Well, that's a big achievement, to have

40 percent of the people you thought were below whatever your guideline was and they actually succeed. And lots of people above fail. And all you have to do is go to any reunion of these elite schools and you will see that it's not a guarantee of success.

So to me, the issue around affirmative action is really much more an issue around opportunity. How do we move up these numbers by giving more kids the opportunity to succeed, and if they fail, they fail. Rather than saying, well, let's not even have them there because it'd be too traumatic for them and for us if they fail. So we'd rather not have them here. So we managed to get our population of executives -- 42 percent women, 23 percent African-America. We did that trial and error. No easy path. And so I think this debate over affirmative action has to get to be a little more rounded; that the notion that somehow time has run out, we ought to stop, it's inherently a bad thing I think is a mistake. I think it's wrong. And I think that the fight is between the doctor's kid and the poor white kid, I think that's not factually correct. I think both of them should be even.

MR. HUTCHINS: Last comment, then we've got to bring this one to a close. We're 10 minutes over our allotted time. I apologize.

MR. GATES: What's your take on the fact that -- you're absolutely right. The number of black kids at Harvard, and I'm sure our sisters schools, is basically the same every year. It's not a quota but it's a met target. But 70 percent -- this is unofficial but public -- of the black kids at Harvard are the children of African immigrants. Seventy percent.

MR. HUTCHINS: And how many have four African-American

grandparents?

MR. GATES: Thirty percent.

MR. HUTCHINS: Thirty percent.

MR. GATES: Have four African-American grandparents.

MR. HUTCHINS: Interesting. So we've got to bring this to a close. Lois, Belle, Ron, thank you very much for being with us today. Skip.

(Applause)

MR. HUTCHINS: Before we go, Skip, thank you for not just coming here today but for this incredible work. Bravo.

MR. GATES: Thank you.

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