WHY FINDING YOUR ROOTS CASTS CELEBRITIES

Public rationale, production economics, financial evidence, and the "regular people" question

Seasons 1-12 | 2012-2026

Research question

Why does the PBS genealogy series use famous subjects, what does the public record show about the choice, and what can - and cannot - be established about its finances and audience?

Prepared as a documented research report for Genealogy Bargains

Web research cutoff: 19 August 2026

Citation practice: Evidence Explained-style full first notes, shortened subsequent notes, and source-list entries.

Contents

Executive finding
1. Scope, method, and evidence labels
2. The stated rationale: what Gates, the producers, PBS, and WETA say
3. Production and economic logic
4. Financial record, Seasons 1-12
5. Audience evidence and the ratings question
6. Critique, editorial independence, and the counterargument
7. Non-celebrity precedents and public-facing education
8. Conclusion
9. Evidence-quality assessment and next research steps
Endnotes
Source list

Executive finding

BOTTOM LINE **Celebrity is a format strategy, not a genealogical necessity.**

The strongest evidence shows that famous guests are used as recognizable narrative portals into broad histories of migration, race, religion, labor, family, and national identity. The public record does not establish that PBS or the producers require celebrities as a condition of funding, nor does it disclose a full season or per-episode budget.[1]

Henry Louis Gates Jr., McGee Media, Kunhardt Films, PBS, and WETA consistently describe the series as public-history storytelling built around influential or otherwise compelling people whose family trees open onto larger American and human themes.[2] Gates has also described ancestry as a source of rootedness and shared humanity, and the companion books present celebrity case studies alongside practical encouragement for viewers to investigate their own families.[3] None of the located on-record statements says that celebrities are cast because an underwriter, PBS, or WETA mandates fame.[4]

Producer interviews supply the more concrete operational explanation: candidates must be available; their lines must yield accessible records and documentary support; the material must add historical context; and the research must resolve into a television story with a "beginning, middle and end."[5] For one season, a four-person genealogy team reported more than 10,000 research hours for 28 guests, while one difficult line required about 600 hours to establish three generations.[6] Those figures make selection risk central: a guest may be famous, yet still fail if the records, permissions, chronology, or usable story do not come together.[7]

DOCUMENTED CONTEXT: Corporate and station materials show that recognizable guests are commercially useful even when no source openly calls that the casting reason. WETA markets the program to sponsors as a multi-platform way to align a brand with an engaged audience, and Ford Motor Company built a Season 2 package that included a 30-second spot in every episode, a ten-part digital series, a live screening and chat, and social-media activity.[8] PBS also distributes the series through broadcast, streaming, and retail-platform access, while Ancestry links its sponsorship to viewers' ability to begin their own research.[9]

INFERENCE: Celebrity familiarity likely lowers audience-acquisition and promotion risk for a format in which each subject can absorb hundreds of research hours before producers know whether the line will yield a coherent episode.[10] That inference is supported by the sponsorship and marketing record, but it is not a quotation or disclosed policy from Gates, McGee Media, PBS, or WETA.[11]

The financial record is much thinner than the credits make it appear. PBS and WETA Forms 990 disclose network- or station-wide program-service totals, not a Finding Your Roots line item; McGee Media is privately held; public sponsor credits usually omit dollar amounts; and no verified per-episode or per-season budget was located.[12] Title-specific grant records do establish four Moore Foundation awards totaling $2.75 million across 2020, 2023, and 2024, and a $400,000 Atlantic Philanthropies grant in 2011 to the predecessor/development title Faces of America: Finding Our Roots, but neither record is a complete season budget.[13]

The counterevidence is important. African American Lives 2 selected Kathleen Henderson from more than 2,000 applicants, and Season 10 selected three viewers from more than 9,000 submissions for "Viewers Like You."[14] Gates said the civilian episode's ratings were the same as those for celebrity episodes, although an independently published Nielsen table supporting that comparison was not located.[15] The evidence therefore supports a narrower conclusion than "only celebrities work": celebrities are the franchise's repeatable packaging device, while ordinary participants have shown that the genealogy itself can carry the program.[16]

1. Scope, method, and evidence labels

This report covers the broadcast franchise from African American Lives and Faces of America through Finding Your Roots Seasons 1-12, with financial review concentrated on the 2012-2026 series.[17] Research searched current producer, station, network, foundation, corporate, grant, tax-filing, trade-press, educational, and scholarly sources through 19 August 2026.[18]

ON THE RECORD **Stated rationale**

Direct public language from Gates, McGee Media, Kunhardt Films, PBS, WETA, or a named producer. These claims are presented as what the speaker or organization says, not as proof of an unstated business motive.

DOCUMENTED CONTEXT **External evidence**

Reporting, scholarship, grants, filings, credits, marketing materials, or competitor descriptions that document how the format operates or is financed.

INFERENCE **Analytical conclusion**

A conclusion drawn from multiple sources but not stated verbatim by the producers or PBS. Every inference is labeled and tied to the evidence from which it is drawn.

Negative findings are recorded as search results rather than converted into estimates. For example, the absence of a public title-level budget means "not located in the public record reviewed," not "no budget exists."[19] Similarly, a sponsor credit proves acknowledged support but does not reveal the amount, cash-versus-in-kind composition, contract term, or season allocation unless another source supplies those details.[20]

2. The stated rationale: what Gates, the producers, PBS, and WETA say

2.1 Gates: famous lives as entry points into shared history

The franchise began with prominent African American subjects, but Gates framed their trees as demonstrations of the depth present in ordinary Black family histories and said the subjects were chosen before the researchers knew what their ancestries would contain.[21] The logic was exemplary rather than aristocratic: recognizable people could attract attention, while their ancestors would reveal enslavement, migration, work, kinship, and survival across the same historical systems that shaped millions of less visible families.[22]

Faces of America broadened the inquiry to well-known Americans from varied backgrounds and explicitly asked what made America and what Americans share.[23] The Finding Your Roots companion books carried that structure forward by interweaving the histories of more than twenty luminaries with immigration, assimilation, conflict, success, archival method, and genetic research for the general reader.[24] In a 2026 NPR interview, Gates described ancestral knowledge as a foundation for understanding oneself and emphasized that the emotional response crosses national, religious, and other identities.[25]

ON THE RECORD: Gates's recurring public rationale is therefore not "celebrities deserve genealogy" but "recognized individuals can make large historical processes personal, emotional, and legible."[26] TheWrap reported that Gates sees the show as a way to introduce viewers to history and attributes its appeal to recurring human themes and shared ancestry.[27]

2.2 McGee Media and the casting matrix

McGee Media's current program description calls the subjects "compelling guests" and says their stories illuminate both diversity and commonality in America's roots.[28] A 2024 production interview reported that the team seeks a broad and rich range of stories, invites many potential guests before the genealogical work is complete, and favors historical contexts the series has not already covered.[29] That selection process was applied to more than 9,000 civilian applicants for Season 10, not only to celebrities.[30]

The same interview described a ten-month production window, a core group of producers, associate producers, and researchers, questionnaires and multiple DNA tests, and five-hour guest interviews.[31] A viable episode requires a documentary trail and a story that can be shaped into a beginning, middle, and end.[32] Availability and timing also matter: producers maintain a waitlist and sometimes approach people whose public visibility has risen with the cultural moment.[33]

ON THE RECORD: The producers publicly describe fame as only one part of a multifactor decision; story range, novelty, researchability, and scheduling are explicit criteria.[34] No located interview states that a high level of fame can compensate for an unusable paper trail or a story that cannot be documented.[35]

2.3 Kunhardt Films, PBS, and WETA

Kunhardt Films describes Season 3 as following influential people who help shape national identity and as converting their discoveries into compelling television and public discussion.[36] PBS describes the current series as using influential guests to uncover family mysteries, while its program page places full episodes, clips, streaming access, and curriculum resources in one public-facing package.[37] WETA press materials say the series personalizes history and emphasizes human connection, while Season 5 publicity stresses that celebrated descendants often came from ordinary ancestors who did remarkable things.[38]

WETA's public-facing sponsorship materials speak in a different register: they market the series as an opportunity for brands to reach an engaged audience across platforms.[39] **DOCUMENTED CONTEXT:** That language demonstrates that the program's cast, reputation, and audience have sponsorship value, but it does not prove that sponsors select guests or that fame is an underwriting condition.[40]

2.4 What the public statements do not say

- No located statement by Gates, McGee Media, Kunhardt Films, PBS, or WETA says celebrities are required because ordinary people would not rate.[41]
- No located public underwriting agreement gives a sponsor authority to approve or veto cast members.[42]
- No located public source states that celebrity guests are paid an appearance fee, or identifies such a fee as a budget line.[43]
- No located public source gives a formal minimum-fame threshold, camera-test policy, or fixed percentage of invitees who fail during research.[44]

3. Production and economic logic

3.1 Research cost and selection risk

The most concrete production-cost evidence is labor, not dollars. For Season 4, genealogists reported more than 10,000 research hours for 28 guests, and the team spent about 600 hours resolving three generations in Ava DuVernay's family.[45] The same account describes international access problems and uneven records, while later production reporting emphasizes that the story must be supported by documents before it can become television.[46]

A 2013 estimate reported by TV Insider placed ordinary research time at roughly 200-300 hours per guest, although difficult cases can run much longer.[47] These figures are historical production estimates, not audited costs, and they do not include producing, travel, archival licensing, animation, DNA testing, fact-checking, legal review, editing, music, postproduction, or distribution.[48] They nevertheless document a high sunk-cost risk before an episode is finished.[49]

INFERENCE: A recognized guest offers an additional return on that research investment because the name can be used in press, social promotion, episode titles, station schedules, retail listings, and sponsor activations before the viewer knows the ancestral story.[50] That does not make the genealogy cheaper; it makes the completed package easier to market.[51]

3.2 Records access, permissions, and story architecture

Researchability is partly a function of record survival, jurisdiction, language, access restrictions, and the ability to corroborate an identity across sources.[52] The producers also need permission to discuss sensitive family facts and must decide how to handle discoveries that could harm living people.[53] Producer Nick Sheedy's public formulation that the series is not "Jerry Springer" captures a stated preference for responsible revelation over shock.[54]

On-camera performance is less formally documented. The public record establishes long filmed interviews and a format built around the guest's reactions, but no located source describes a formal screen test or a rule that only professional performers can succeed.[55] **INFERENCE:** Celebrities are generally practiced interview subjects, which may reduce presentation risk, but that proposition remains an inference rather than a stated casting policy.[56]

3.3 Audience acquisition, underwriting, licensing, and distribution

Ford Motor Company's Season 2 support is the clearest public example of a sponsor using the celebrity format as a marketing platform.[57] Its package placed a 30-second Ford-history spot in every episode and extended the relationship into a ten-part digital series, a live online screening and chat, an event with Gates, and branded social conversation.[58] The release does not disclose Ford's payment or the production budget.[59]

WETA's current sponsorship pages likewise sell cross-platform audience access and brand alignment, while PBS makes the program available through broadcast and digital streaming and lists retail-platform access.[60] Ancestry's program pages connect sponsored television to consumer genealogy by inviting viewers to begin their own research.[61] **DOCUMENTED CONTEXT:** These materials establish audience acquisition and brand association as part of the economic environment around the series.[62]

INFERENCE: Celebrity names improve discoverability in electronic program guides, press coverage, streaming menus, podcast interviews, clips, and search results, so they likely reduce the promotional burden of explaining why a particular unknown family deserves an hour of national television.[63] The Season 10 civilian experiment weakens any claim that this advantage is indispensable, because Gates reported comparable ratings for the non-celebrity episode.[64]

3.4 Lineage and competitors

African American Lives used prominent Black participants as an ensemble through which the program could demonstrate the recoverability and historical richness of African American family histories.[65] Faces of America expanded the ensemble across national origins and framed recognizable Americans as answers to questions about the making of the country.[66] Finding Your Roots retained the host-led book-of-life reveal, mixed archival genealogy with genetics, and grouped guests by theme.[67]

The British format Who Do You Think You Are? explicitly describes popular celebrities as routes into national historical themes and emphasizes the emotional person behind the public image.[68] Ancestry's U.S. materials similarly use stars to attract viewers and then redirect them toward personal

family-history research.[69] PBS's Genealogy Roadshow supplied the clearest same-network counterformat by centering diverse members of the public and connecting individual pasts to city and community history.[70]

Scholar Anne-Marie Kramer's analysis of Who Do You Think You Are? identifies celebrity emotion and transformation as central to audience identification, a useful historical explanation of why the genre repeatedly chooses people viewers already recognize.[71] **DOCUMENTED CONTEXT:** Finding Your Roots belongs to a transnational television grammar in which celebrity supplies an immediate character, genealogy supplies suspense and revelation, and historical context supplies public-service value.[72]

4. Financial record, Seasons 1-12

4.1 What the filings can and cannot show

Public nonprofit filings are useful for scale and institutional context, but they are not production ledgers for an individual series. PBS's Form 990 groups hundreds of content, promotion, distribution, technology, and venture activities; WETA's filings group national television and digital production across a portfolio that includes many programs besides Finding Your Roots.[73] No title-level Finding Your Roots expense, revenue, grant, or underwriting line appears in the reviewed Part III program-service summaries.[74]

Table 1. Aggregate nonprofit filings reviewed - not Finding Your Roots budgets

Filing	Program line	Expenses	Revenue / grants	Scope warning
PBS Form 990; tax year ended 30 Jun. 2024[75]	Content and Promotion; Part III, line 4a, p. 2	$413,854,922[76]	Revenue $123,410,797; grants $6,787,403[77]	PBS-wide; no title line[78]
PBS Form 990; tax year ended 30 Jun. 2024[79]	Distribution and IT; Part III, line 4b, p. 2	$75,519,446[80]	Revenue $988,693; grants $4,700[81]	PBS-wide; no title line[82]
WETA Form 990; tax year ended 30 Jun. 2025[83]	National television and digital production; Part III, p. 2	$64,223,241[84]	Revenue $4,442,324; grants $1,093,092[85]	WETA portfolio; no title line[86]
WETA Form 990; tax year ended 30 Jun. 2024[87]	National television and digital production; Part III, p. 2	$81,812,634[88]	Revenue $7,134,081; grants $677,112[89]	WETA portfolio; no title line[90]

PBS's filing also reports total revenue of $558,177,775 and total expenses of $550,651,752 for the tax year ended 30 June 2024, but those totals encompass the entire organization.[91] The figures above are included to establish institutional scale and to prevent a category error: none should be cited as the show's budget.[92]

4.2 Title-specific grants and disclosed amounts

Table 2. Verified title-linked grant records

Funder	Date	Amount	Term	What the record supports
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation[93]	Oct. 2020[94]	$750,000[95]	12 months[96]	Civic-science engagement through Finding Your Roots; not a complete season budget.[97]
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation[98]	Jul. 2023[99]	$750,000[100]	18 months[101]	Title-linked support; the public record does not assign the whole award to one season.[102]
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation[103]	Sep. 2023[104]	$250,000[105]	12 months[106]	Title-linked support; no public episode allocation.[107]
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation[108]	Oct. 2024[109]	$1,000,000[110]	16 months[111]	Title-linked support overlapping later production; not a full-budget disclosure.[112]
Atlantic Philanthropies[113]	2011[114]	$400,000[115]	12 months[116]	Grant to WNET for Faces of America: Finding Our Roots, a predecessor/development title; not a verified Season 1 total.[117]

The four Moore Foundation awards total $2.75 million, but their terms overlap calendar periods and cannot responsibly be converted into a per-season or per-episode figure without grant agreements or project budgets.[118] The Atlantic record is similarly specific about its amount and title but not about the total production cost of the later PBS series.[119]

4.3 Corporate, foundation, and public-funding verification

- Johnson & Johnson appears in official funding credits for Season 1 and multiple later seasons, including Seasons 7, 8, 11, and 12; no public title-level amount was located.[120]
- Ancestry appears in official credits across multiple later seasons and publicly promotes its Season 12 support; no public title-level amount was located.[121]
- 23andMe publicly described genotyping all Season 1 celebrity participants and consulting the producers; that source documents technical participation, not underwriting, and no 23andMe cash amount was located.[122]
- The Ford Foundation appears in Season 1 credits, while Ford Motor Company publicly documented a distinct integrated Season 2 sponsorship activation; neither source discloses a title-level amount.[123]
- The W.K. Kellogg Foundation appears in Season 12 credits; no title-level amount was located.[124]
- No verified Finding Your Roots credit or award from Lilly Endowment was located in the sources reviewed.[125]
- The Corporation for Public Broadcasting is credited as a major funder in official releases, including Season 12, but no public title-level CPB dollar amount was located in the reviewed records.[126]
- Searches of the NEH award database for Finding Your Roots, McGee Media, and title variants did not identify a title-specific NEH award; the result should be read as a documented search gap, not proof that no application or indirect support ever existed.[127]

4.4 Season-by-season public record

Table 3. Seasons 1-12: verified public financial and audience evidence

Season	Broadcast	Verified public evidence	Budget / audience gap
1[128]	2012[129]	Official credits name Coca-Cola, Johnson & Johnson, McDonald's, American Express, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Atlantic Philanthropies, Ford Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, CPB, and PBS. 23andMe documented technical/genotyping support. WNET reported an average audience of nearly 2.5 million and a 1.8 household rating; cumulative reach was 16.6 million.[130]	No full season or per-episode budget located. Atlantic's $400,000 predecessor grant is not a verified total.[131]
2[132]	2014[133]	Ford Motor Company documented a season-long integrated sponsorship with in-episode spots, a digital series, live event, and social activation.[134]	No sponsor amount, season budget, or season-average Nielsen figure located.[135]
3[136]	2016[137]	The season followed the 2015 PBS editorial-independence review and resumed with additional safeguards; Kunhardt described its subjects as influential people whose histories create compelling television.[138]	No reliable official title-level budget, sponsor amount, or season-average audience figure located in this review.[139]
4[140]	2017[141]	Official station credits name Ancestry, Johnson & Johnson, AT&T, Ford Foundation, and other donors; genealogists reported more than 10,000 research hours for 28 guests.[142]	No season or per-episode budget and no season-average audience figure located.[143]
5[144]	2019[145]	WETA credits Ancestry, Johnson & Johnson, AT&T, Ford Foundation, Candace King Weir, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, CPB, and PBS.[146]	No title-level amounts, season budget, or season-average audience figure located.[147]
6[148]	2019-2020[149]	WETA credits Ancestry, Johnson & Johnson, AT&T, Ford Foundation, Candace King Weir, CPB, and PBS.[150]	No title-level amounts, season budget, or season-average audience figure located.[151]
7[152]	2021[153]	WETA credits Ancestry and Johnson & Johnson, plus foundation and donor support and CPB/PBS; a $750,000 Moore grant dated October 2020 overlaps the production period but is not assigned publicly as a Season 7 total.[154]	No complete season budget or season-average audience figure located.[155]
8[156]	2022[157]	WETA credits Johnson & Johnson, Ford Foundation, Moore Foundation, Candace King Weir, Lloyd Carney Foundation, Inkwell Society members, and CPB.[158]	No title-level sponsor amounts, full season budget, or season-average audience figure located.[159]

Season	Broadcast	Verified public evidence	Budget / audience gap
9[160]	2023[161]	PBS credits Ancestry and Johnson & Johnson, CPB, Ford Foundation, Candace King Weir, and the Inkwell Society; PBS Books mounted a related national-conversation series.[162]	No full season budget or season-average audience figure located.[163]
10[164]	2024[165]	AARP publicly identified itself as a corporate sponsor; Moore grants of $750,000 and $250,000 dated 2023 overlap this period. Three viewers selected from more than 9,000 applicants appeared in the finale. Gates said its ratings matched celebrity episodes.[166]	No independently published Nielsen table, full budget, or public allocation of overlapping grants to Season 10 located.[167]
11[168]	2025[169]	PBS credits Gilead Sciences, Ancestry, Johnson & Johnson, CPB, Ford Foundation, Moore Foundation, Candace King Weir, the Inkwell Society, and viewers; Moore awarded $1 million in October 2024 for 16 months.[170]	No public season budget, grant-to-season allocation, or season-average audience figure located.[171]
12[172]	2026[173]	PBS credits Gilead Sciences, Ancestry, Johnson & Johnson, CPB, Ford Foundation, Moore Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Candace King Weir, the Inkwell Society, and viewers.[174]	No public season or per-episode budget and no season-average audience figure located as of 19 August 2026.[175]

The table intentionally repeats "not located" because the public record does not justify interpolating missing years from adjacent seasons.[176] The same caution applies to grant dates: an award that overlaps a broadcast year is not automatically that season's complete budget.[177]

4.5 McGee Media and the limits of private-company disclosure

McGee Media is the production company identified on the series' official materials, but no public company financial statement, title-level production ledger, or audited cost report was located.[178] The absence is unsurprising for a private production company, but the report does not infer revenue, profit, ownership economics, guest compensation, or production margins from that silence.[179] Direct inquiry would be required for season cost reports, producer fees, research/vendor contracts, archival and music licensing, insurance, travel, postproduction, and the cash-versus-in-kind composition of sponsor support.[180]

5. Audience evidence and the ratings question

Season 1 is the best-documented season in the public audience record located for this report. WNET reported an average of nearly 2.5 million viewers and a 1.8 household rating, 29 percent above PBS's then prime-time average of 2.1 million viewers and a 1.4 rating; all ten episodes exceeded that average, and cumulative reach was 16.6 million.[181] The release also reported that Black households represented 12 percent of the series audience compared with 8 percent of PBS prime-time viewing households.[182]

For later seasons, the public record is fragmentary. In 2024, TheWrap reported that the show had achieved linear ratings growth over the preceding three years and was PBS's top-rated regularly scheduled program at that time, but the article did not publish a complete season-by-season Nielsen table.[183] The same article quotes Gates saying the Season 10 regular-people episode drew the same ratings as celebrity episodes.[184]

No verified season-average Nielsen or PBS audience figure was located for Seasons 2-9, 11, or 12, and no estimate is supplied.[185] WETA's statement that the show is enjoyed by millions is useful sponsorship language but is not a season-specific ratings measure.[186] **INFERENCE:** The available evidence supports the proposition that celebrities have helped build a durable audience, but it does not support the stronger proposition that an episode about ordinary people necessarily performs worse.[187]

6. Critique, editorial independence, and the counterargument

6.1 The accessibility and "regular people" critique

Critics of celebrity genealogy argue that television compresses months of archival labor into revelation scenes, hides failed searches and interpretive choices, and can make an expensive research

apparatus look like an ordinary consumer experience.[188] Jessica Albert argues that non-famous families can be equally compelling and that the format's focus on celebrities can obscure the resources and curation behind the finished story.[189] Daniella Weiss Ashkenazy similarly praises historical context while arguing that televised archival discovery may leave family dynamics and silences beyond the documents underexplored.[190]

Recent scholarship adds a different concern. Helga Lenart-Cheng analyzes how television authority can convert probabilistic genomic evidence into apparently settled truth and calls attention to the private databases, labor, and privacy structures behind the genetic narrative.[191] That critique does not turn on celebrity alone, but fame can intensify the authority effect because viewers already know the subject as a public figure.[192]

6.2 The Affleck case: 2015, not 2019

DATE CORRECTION **The controversy broke in April-June 2015.**

The relevant Sony emails were written in July 2014 and became public in April 2015. PBS announced the results of its investigation in June 2015. The event is therefore a 2015 editorial-independence case, not a 2019 controversy.[193]

The hacked emails showed Ben Affleck seeking removal of a slaveholding ancestor from his segment and Gates consulting Sony executive Michael Lynton about the request.[194] In the email exchange, Gates warned, "Once we open the door to censorship, we lose control of the brand," yet the slaveholding ancestor was omitted from the broadcast.[195] Affleck later acknowledged lobbying Gates and described the production as a collaborative creative process.[196]

Gates and McGee Media apologized to production partners for not disclosing the request, and PBS investigated whether the omission violated editorial standards.[197] PBS delayed Season 3, withdrew the episode from distribution, required additional fact-checking and an independent genealogist, and conditioned future funding on compliance measures.[198] The case reveals that subject cooperation can create editorial pressure even when the guest is not formally an editor.[199]

DOCUMENTED CONTEXT: Celebrity participation can increase both promotional value and bargaining power, because a well-known guest has reputation managers, relationships, and a public image at stake.[200] The 2015 safeguards are therefore relevant to casting economics: a high-value subject can also impose higher editorial-governance risk.[201] The public record does not show that comparable pressure is routine, and the report does not generalize one documented case into a universal practice.[202]

6.3 Counterargument: celebrities can democratize attention

The strongest counterargument is that celebrity is a delivery mechanism for histories the prime-time audience might not otherwise choose.[203] A known actor, athlete, writer, politician, chef, or musician supplies immediate curiosity; the episode can then redirect that attention to unknown laborers, migrants, enslaved people, refugees, soldiers, farmers, and parents in the guest's ancestry.[204] WETA's Season 5 framing explicitly emphasizes ordinary ancestors whose actions become visible through their successful descendants.[205]

Kramer's scholarship on the genre suggests that the public persona also creates an emotional before-and-after structure: viewers watch a familiar person become newly vulnerable, surprised, or reoriented by the past.[206] Gates's own explanation stresses universality and connection rather than status.[207] **INFERENCE:** Under this view, the celebrity does not displace ordinary history; the celebrity subsidizes attention to it.[208]

7. Non-celebrity precedents and public-facing education

7.1 Kathleen Henderson and African American Lives 2

African American Lives 2 selected Kathleen Henderson from more than 2,000 applicants and researched her alongside prominent participants.[209] Her profile records the audience demand in plain language: relatives asked why the programs "keep doing famous people" instead of "regular people."[210] The selection established, years before Finding Your Roots, that the franchise could use the same high-end research apparatus for a viewer without a public career.[211]

7.2 "Viewers Like You," Season 10

Season 10's "Viewers Like You" episode featured three everyday Americans chosen after a public casting call that drew more than 9,000 submissions.[212] Producers said they applied the same selection logic used for celebrity guests, looking for compelling, documentable stories and useful historical context.[213] Gates later said the episode's ratings were the same as those for celebrity installments.[214]

The result is a direct test of the thesis that fame is indispensable. It does not show that a full season of unknown participants would have identical marketing, sponsorship, or ratings performance, but it does show that ordinary participants can sustain the core research-and-reveal format for a national episode.[215]

7.3 Classroom, curriculum, and viewer initiatives

The franchise repeatedly converts celebrity episodes into resources for ordinary users. PBS has published a video offering eight steps for beginning personal research, and the program page links viewers to curriculum materials.[216] The Finding Your Roots Curriculum uses genealogy and genetics to teach science and identity in camps and college modules.[217]

In 2015, the curriculum received $355,000 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for middle-school summer camps and $304,000 from the National Science Foundation for a college module, a combined $659,000.[218] Those grants supported education, not the television production budget, and should not be entered as season financing.[219] PBS Books later organized a free national-conversation series around family documents, youth, and science, while WETA maintains engagement reports for Seasons 3-12 and solicits Inkwell Society support for Gates-related production, digital, educational, and engagement work.[220]

DOCUMENTED CONTEXT: These initiatives answer part of the accessibility critique by making the celebrity program a gateway to viewer research and classroom activity.[221] They do not provide individual viewers with the hundreds of professional research hours, international access, DNA analysis, and production resources supplied to on-screen subjects.[222]

8. Conclusion

The public record supports three different answers to the question "Why celebrities?" and they should not be collapsed. **ON THE RECORD:** Gates and the producing institutions use influential or compelling people to personalize large histories, reveal commonality across difference, and inspire viewers to investigate their own origins.[223] **DOCUMENTED CONTEXT:** Producers select for availability, records, documentary support, novelty, narrative completion, sensitivity, and interview material; sponsorship and distribution systems then exploit the recognizability of the finished cast.[224] **INFERENCE:** Celebrity familiarity reduces promotional risk and increases the potential return on intensive research, even though it does not reduce the genealogical difficulty.[225]

The evidence does not establish a sponsor mandate, a PBS rule, a disclosed minimum audience threshold, or a public budget model that mathematically requires famous guests.[226] It also does not support the claim that regular people cannot work on television: Kathleen Henderson and the Season 10

viewers are direct counterexamples, and Gates reported comparable ratings for the latter.[227] The most defensible conclusion is therefore institutional rather than genealogical: celebrity is the franchise's durable acquisition, narrative, and marketing architecture; ordinary ancestry remains the substantive content.[228]

9. Evidence-quality assessment and next research steps

9.1 Where the record is strong

- Stated narrative purpose: official producer, PBS, WETA, and Gates sources consistently describe the show as personalized public history and a demonstration of shared roots.[229]
- Operational casting criteria: recent producer interviews document availability, story range, historical novelty, record support, research process, interview length, and narrative structure.[230]
- Research intensity: contemporaneous genealogy-team reporting supplies concrete hour estimates and examples of difficult record problems.[231]
- Editorial-independence case study: contemporaneous 2015 reporting documents the Affleck request, internal discussion, apology, PBS findings, and corrective measures.[232]
- Selected grant amounts and institutional totals: foundation databases and Forms 990 give exact figures, dates, terms, pages, and program-service lines, with clear scope limitations.[233]

9.2 Where the record is thin

- No complete title-level budget, per-episode cost, producer fee, guest-payment policy, research-vendor total, or season profit-and-loss statement was located.[234]
- Public sponsor credits rarely disclose cash amounts, in-kind services, contract duration, or rights packages.[235]
- Public filings aggregate PBS and WETA activity and do not permit allocation to Finding Your Roots.[236]
- Season-level audience data are complete only for Season 1 in the sources located; later claims are selective and not accompanied by a full Nielsen table.[237]
- No public source reviewed provides a formal cast funnel: number approached, number accepting, number abandoned after research, or reasons for abandonment by season.[238]

9.3 What would resolve the gaps

- Direct inquiry to McGee Media, WETA, PBS, Kunhardt Films, and the Inkwell entities for title budgets, cost reports, underwriting agreements, sponsor rights, guest releases, and cast-selection memoranda.[239]
- Targeted requests to WETA and PBS archives for Station Relations packets, TCA transcripts, press-tour recordings, internal production histories, DVD supplements, and companion-book editorial files.[240]
- A request to Nielsen or PBS Research for season-average live-plus-same-day and cross-platform measures, including the Season 10 civilian-versus-celebrity comparison.[241]
- NEH Freedom of Information Act inquiry for any responsive application, declination, or administrative record not visible in the award database; CPB inquiry under its own disclosure procedures for title-specific grant and contract records.[242]
- Archival research in Gates's, WNET's, WETA's, and producer collections, where donor agreements, early format proposals, and correspondence may eventually become available.[243]

Overall assessment: the evidence is strong enough to explain the stated public-history rationale and the production filters, and strong enough to identify a plausible business logic as inference.[244] It is not strong enough to reconstruct a season budget, assign sponsor dollars to episodes, or prove that celebrity casting is a contractual financial requirement.[245]

Endnotes

Full references appear at first citation; later references use shortened forms. Web sources were accessed 19 August 2026 unless otherwise stated. Historical-source flags identify items more than five years old where currency might otherwise be misunderstood.

1. McGee Media, "Finding Your Roots," program page, n.d. (https://www.mcgeemedia.com/fyr : accessed 19 August 2026); Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3," project page, n.d. (https://kunhardtfilms.com/our-films/finding-your-roots-season-3/ : accessed 19 August 2026); Steve Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism One Family Tree at a Time," TheWrap, 19 August 2024 (https://www.thewrap.com/finding-your-roots-henry-louis-gates-jr-fights-racism/ : accessed 19 August 2026); Research log for this report, 19 August 2026, documenting searches of PBS, WETA, CPB, NEH, IRS/GuideStar, foundation grant databases, trade press, and producer websites for title-level Finding Your Roots budgets, per-episode costs, sponsor amounts, and season-level Nielsen data; unpublished electronic research notes in the author's possession.

2. McGee Media, "Finding Your Roots"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Season Eight Premieres January 2022," press release, n.d. (https://weta.org/press/finding-your-roots-henry-louis-gates-jr-season-eight-premieres-january-2022 : accessed 19 August 2026); PBS, "Finding Your Roots," program page, n.d. (https://www.pbs.org/show/finding-your-roots/ : accessed 19 August 2026).

3. Avery Keatley, Sarah McCammon, Jeanette Woods, and Jason Fuller, "You Need This Knowledge, Says Henry Louis Gates Jr. as New Season of Finding Your Roots Premieres," NPR, 17 January 2026, transcript hosted by WLRN (https://www.wlrn.org/npr-breaking-news/2026-01-17/you-need-this-knowledge-says-henry-louis-gates-jr-as-new-season-of-finding-your-roots-premieres : accessed 19 August 2026); Henry Louis Gates Jr., Finding Your Roots: The Official Companion to the PBS Series (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). [HISTORICAL - used for the companion-book framing of Seasons 1-2]; Henry Louis Gates Jr., Finding Your Roots, Season 2: The Official Companion to the PBS Series (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016). [HISTORICAL - used for the Season 2 companion-book framing].

4. Research log, 19 August 2026.

5. Paula Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research Into Essential TV," Television Academy, 9 April 2024 (https://www.televisionacademy.com/features/news/online-originals/finding-your-roots-pbs-dna-genetic-research-interview : accessed 19 August 2026); Dan Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA? Questions Answered About the PBS Series," TV Insider, 14 December 2024 (https://www.tvinsider.com/1165703/finding-your-roots-pbs-production-questions-answered/ : accessed 19 August 2026).

6. Daniel Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots," WTTW, 2 October 2017 (https://www.wttw.com/playlist/2017/09/29/how-genealogists-find-your-roots : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for contemporaneous Season 4 research-labor evidence].

7. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots".

8. WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship," corporate sponsorship page, n.d. (https://weta.org/sponsorship/shows/finding-your-roots : accessed 19 August 2026); WETA, "Corporate Sponsorship," n.d. (https://weta.org/support/corporate : accessed 19 August 2026); Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season of Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on PBS," press release, 12 September 2014, PR Newswire (https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/ford-supports-second-season-of-finding-your-roots-with-henry-louis-gates-jr-on-pbs-274892411.html : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for the 2014 sponsorship activation only].

9. PBS, "Finding Your Roots" program page; Ancestry, "Finding Your Roots Season 12 Premiere," Ancestry Blog, 2026 (https://www.ancestry.com/c/ancestry-blog/entertainment-and-culture/finding-your-roots-season-12-premiere : accessed 19 August 2026); Ancestry, "Who Do You Think You Are?" program page, n.d. (https://www.ancestry.com/c/who-do-you-think-you-are : accessed 19 August 2026).

10. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship".

11. Research log, 19 August 2026.

12. Public Broadcasting Service, IRS Form 990, tax year 1 July 2023-30 June 2024, Part I, p. 1, and Part III, p. 2, digital image, GuideStar (https://pdf.guidestar.org/PDF_Images/2024/520/899/2024-520899215-202501299349303195-9.pdf : accessed 19 August 2026); Greater Washington Educational Telecommunications Association, Inc. (WETA), IRS Form 990, tax year 1 July 2024-30 June 2025, Part III, p. 2, digital image (https://weta.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/2024-WETA-990-%20Public%20DIsclosure.pdf : accessed 19 August 2026); Greater Washington Educational Telecommunications Association, Inc. (WETA), IRS Form 990, tax year 1 July 2023-30 June 2024, Part III, p. 2, digital image (https://weta.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/2023-WETA-Form%20990%20Public%20Disclosure.pdf : accessed 19 August 2026); Research log, 19 August 2026.

13. Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots," grant database, awards dated October 2020, July 2023, September 2023, and October 2024 (https://moore.org/grant-detail?grantId=GBMF12923 : accessed 19 August 2026); The Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots," grant record, 2011, $400,000, 12 months (https://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/grants/faces-of-america-finding-our-roots : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for the 2011 development grant only].

14. THIRTEEN, "Kathleen Henderson," African American Lives 2 profile, n.d. (https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/profiles/henderson.html : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for the 2008 viewer-selection precedent]; "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., season 10, episode

10, PBS, broadcast 9 April 2024; streaming preview and program page (https://www.pbs.org/video/viewers-like-you-preview/ : accessed 19 August 2026); Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

15. Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

16. THIRTEEN, "Kathleen Henderson"; "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots, season 10; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

17. THIRTEEN, "About African American Lives," 2006 (https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/2006/about.html : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for the 2006 program premise]; Kunhardt Films, "Faces of America," project page, n.d. (https://kunhardtfilms.com/our-films/faces-of-america/ : accessed 19 August 2026); PBS, "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Season 12 Trailer Release," press release, 8 October 2025, PDF (https://pressroom.pbs.org/-/media/pressroom/public-assets/programs/finding-your-roots/fyr-s12-trailer-release.pdf : accessed 19 August 2026).

18. Research log, 19 August 2026.

19. Research log, 19 August 2026.

20. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Research log, 19 August 2026.

21. THIRTEEN, "African American Lives: A Q+A with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.," 2006 (https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/2006/print/p_profile_gates.html : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for the franchise origin and 2006 selection rationale]; THIRTEEN, "About African American Lives".

22. THIRTEEN, "About African American Lives"; Gates, Finding Your Roots, 2014.

23. Kunhardt Films, "Faces of America".

24. Gates, Finding Your Roots, 2014; Gates, Finding Your Roots, Season 2.

25. Keatley et al., "You Need This Knowledge".

26. THIRTEEN, "African American Lives: Q+A with Gates"; Keatley et al., "You Need This Knowledge"; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

27. Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

28. McGee Media, "Finding Your Roots".

29. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?".

30. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

31. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

32. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

33. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

34. Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?"; Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

35. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

36. Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3".

37. PBS, "Finding Your Roots" program page.

38. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Eight"; WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Premieres Winter 2019 on PBS," press release, n.d. (https://weta.org/press/season-five-finding-your-roots-henry-louis-gates-jr-premieres-winter-2019-pbs-beginning : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for Season 5 framing and credits only].

39. WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship"; WETA, "Corporate Sponsorship".

40. WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

41. Research log, 19 August 2026.

42. Research log, 19 August 2026.

43. Research log, 19 August 2026.

44. Research log, 19 August 2026.

45. Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots".

46. Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

47. Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?".

48. Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?"; Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

49. Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?"; Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots".

50. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; PBS, "Finding Your Roots" program page; WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship".

51. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship".

52. Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

53. Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?"; Dru Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons of Finding Your Roots at Risk after PBS Investigation," Current, 25 June 2015 (https://current.org/2015/06/upcoming-seasons-of-finding-your-

roots-at-risk-after-pbs-investigation/ : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - contemporaneous reporting on the 2015 PBS investigation].

54. Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?".

55. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

56. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

57. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season".

58. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season".

59. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

60. WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship"; WETA, "Corporate Sponsorship"; PBS, "Finding Your Roots" program page.

61. Ancestry, "Who Do You Think You Are?"; Ancestry, "Finding Your Roots Season 12 Premiere".

62. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship"; Ancestry, "Finding Your Roots Season 12 Premiere".

63. PBS, "Finding Your Roots" program page; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship"; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

64. Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

65. THIRTEEN, "About African American Lives"; THIRTEEN, "African American Lives: Q+A with Gates".

66. Kunhardt Films, "Faces of America".

67. Gates, Finding Your Roots, 2014; Gates, Finding Your Roots, Season 2; Keatley et al., "You Need This Knowledge".

68. Wall to Wall, "Who Do You Think You Are?" program page, n.d. (https://www.walltowall.co.uk/program/4/who-do-you-think-you-are : accessed 19 August 2026).

69. Ancestry, "Who Do You Think You Are?".

70. PBS, "Genealogy Roadshow," program page, n.d. (https://www.pbs.org/show/genealogy-roadshow/ : accessed 19 August 2026).

71. Anne-Marie Kramer, "Mediatizing Memory: History, Affect and Identity in Who Do You Think You Are?" European Journal of Cultural Studies 14 (2011), doi:10.1177/1367549411404616. [HISTORICAL - analytical scholarship on the celebrity-genealogy genre].

72. Wall to Wall, "Who Do You Think You Are?"; Kramer, "Mediatizing Memory"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3".

73. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

74. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024; Research log, 19 August 2026.

75. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

76. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

77. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

78. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

79. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

80. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

81. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

82. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

83. WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025.

84. WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025.

85. WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025.

86. WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025.

87. WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

88. WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

89. WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

90. WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

91. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024, Part I, lines 12 and 18, p. 1.

92. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

93. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

94. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

95. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

96. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

97. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

98. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

99. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

100. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

101. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

102. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

103. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

104. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

105. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

106. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

107. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

108. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

109. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

110. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

111. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

112. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

113. Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

114. Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

115. Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

116. Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

117. Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

118. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

119. Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

120. WNET, "PBS Series American Masters and Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Reach Record Number of Viewers," press release, 26 July 2012 (https://www.wnet.org/2012/07/26/pbs-series-american-masters-and-finding-your-roots-with-henry-louis-gates-jr-reach-record-number-of-viewers/ : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for Season 1 audience and funding credits only]; WETA, "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Season Seven Premieres January 19, 2021," press release, n.d. (https://weta.org/sites/default/files/press/FYR7_release.pdf : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for Season 7 framing and credits only]; WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Eight"; PBS, "Finding Your Roots Season 11 Trailer Press Release," 2024, PDF (https://pressroom.pbs.org/-/media/pressroom/public-assets/programs/finding-your-roots/finding-your-roots-s11-trailer-press-release.pdf : accessed 19 August 2026); PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Research log, 19 August 2026.

121. WKNO, "Finding Your Roots, Season 4," program page and funding credits, n.d. (https://www.wkno.org/local-pbs-shows/finding-your-roots/season-4/ : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for Season 4 funding credits only]; WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots"; WETA, "Season Six of Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Premieres Fall 2019 and Airs Through Fall 2020," press release, 29 July 2019 (https://weta.org/press/season-six-finding-your-roots-henry-louis-gates-jr-premieres-fall-2019-and-airs-through-fall : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for Season 6 credits only]; WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Seven"; PBS, "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Season Nine," press release, 2022, DOCX (https://pressroom.pbs.org/-/media/pressroom/public-assets/programs/finding-your-roots/910-out-of-the-past/fyr9_tca-press-release_final_rsvd.docx : accessed 19 August 2026); PBS, "Finding Your Roots Season 11" press release; PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Ancestry, "Finding Your Roots Season 12 Premiere"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

122. 23andMe, "23andMe Provides the Science Behind PBS Series Finding Your Roots," press release, 9 April 2012 (https://www.23andme.org/media-center/press-releases/23andme-provides-the-science-behind-pbs-series-finding-your-roots/ : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for the 2012 technical collaboration only]; Research log, 19 August 2026.

123. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers"; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

124. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release, p. 4; Research log, 19 August 2026.

125. Research log, 19 August 2026.

126. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release, p. 4; Research log, 19 August 2026.

127. National Endowment for the Humanities, "NEH Award Search," grant database (https://awardsearch.neh.gov/ : searched 19 August 2026); Research log, 19 August 2026.

128. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers"; 23andMe, "Provides the Science Behind PBS Series"; Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

129. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers"; 23andMe, "Provides the Science Behind PBS Series"; Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

130. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers"; 23andMe, "Provides the Science Behind PBS Series"; Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

131. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers"; 23andMe, "Provides the Science Behind PBS Series"; Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots".

132. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

133. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

134. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

135. Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

136. Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

137. Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

138. Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

139. Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

140. WKNO, "Finding Your Roots, Season 4"; Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

141. WKNO, "Finding Your Roots, Season 4"; Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

142. WKNO, "Finding Your Roots, Season 4"; Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

143. WKNO, "Finding Your Roots, Season 4"; Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

144. WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

145. WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

146. WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

147. WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

148. WETA, "Season Six of Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

149. WETA, "Season Six of Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

150. WETA, "Season Six of Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

151. WETA, "Season Six of Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

152. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Seven"; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

153. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Seven"; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

154. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Seven"; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

155. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Seven"; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

156. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Eight"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

157. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Eight"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

158. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Eight"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

159. WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Eight"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

160. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season Nine" press release; PBS Books, "Finding Your Roots National Conversation Series," n.d. (https://www.pbsbooks.org/finding-your-roots-national-conversation-series/ : accessed 19 August 2026); Research log, 19 August 2026.

161. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season Nine" press release; PBS Books, "Finding Your Roots National Conversation Series"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

162. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season Nine" press release; PBS Books, "Finding Your Roots National Conversation Series"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

163. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season Nine" press release; PBS Books, "Finding Your Roots National Conversation Series"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

164. AARP, "Finding Your Roots: Bob Odenkirk and Iliza Shlesinger," sponsor article, 2024 (https://www.aarp.org/entertainment/television/finding-your-roots-bob-odenkirk-iliza-shlesinger/ : accessed 19 August 2026); Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots, season 10; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

165. AARP, "Finding Your Roots" sponsor article; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots, season 10; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

166. AARP, "Finding Your Roots" sponsor article; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots, season 10; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

167. AARP, "Finding Your Roots" sponsor article; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots, season 10; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

168. PBS, "Finding Your Roots Season 11" press release; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

169. PBS, "Finding Your Roots Season 11" press release; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

170. PBS, "Finding Your Roots Season 11" press release; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

171. PBS, "Finding Your Roots Season 11" press release; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

172. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Research log, 19 August 2026.

173. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Research log, 19 August 2026.

174. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Research log, 19 August 2026.

175. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Research log, 19 August 2026.

176. Research log, 19 August 2026.

177. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots".

178. McGee Media, "Finding Your Roots"; PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Research log, 19 August 2026.

179. Research log, 19 August 2026.

180. Research log, 19 August 2026.

181. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers".

182. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers".

183. Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

184. Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

185. Research log, 19 August 2026.

186. WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship".

187. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers"; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

188. Jessica Albert, "Celebrity Genealogy Shows - They're Not Just Like Us," History Associates, 3 June 2025 (https://www.historyassociates.com/celebrity-genealogy-shows/ : accessed 19 August 2026).

189. Albert, "Celebrity Genealogy Shows".

190. Daniella Weiss Ashkenazy, "What Programs like Finding Your Roots Miss - and How I Tracked Down My Own Family's History," The Forward, 15 February 2022 (https://forward.com/culture/482550/what-programs-like-finding-your-roots-miss-and-how-i-tracked-down-my-own/ : accessed 19 August 2026).

191. Helga Lenart-Cheng, "Platform Authority on Prime Time: PBS's Finding Your Roots and the Televisual Production of Genetic Truth," Television & New Media, published online 31 July 2026, doi:10.1177/15274764261468216; abstract indexed at MetaTOC (https://www.metatoc.com/papers/199507-platform-authority-on-prime-time-pbs-s-finding-your-roots-and-the-televisual-production-of-genetic-truth : accessed 19 August 2026).

192. Lenart-Cheng, "Platform Authority on Prime Time"; Kramer, "Mediatizing Memory".

193. Dru Sefton, "Hacked Emails Imply Possible Finding Your Roots Censorship by Gates," Current, 18 April 2015 (https://current.org/2015/04/hacked-emails-imply-possible-finding-your-roots-censorship-by-gates/ : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - contemporaneous reporting on the 2015 controversy]; Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk".

194. Sefton, "Hacked Emails Imply Possible Censorship"; Dru Sefton, "Affleck Admits Asking Gates to Omit Family's Slave-Owning Past from Finding Your Roots," Current, 22 April 2015 (https://current.org/2015/04/affleck-admits-asking-gates-to-omit-familys-slave-owning-past-from-finding-your-roots/ : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - contemporaneous reporting on the 2015 controversy].

195. Sefton, "Hacked Emails Imply Possible Censorship".

196. Sefton, "Affleck Admits Asking Gates".

197. Dru Sefton, "Gates Apologizes to Production Partners over Finding Your Roots Controversy," Current, 23 April 2015 (https://current.org/2015/04/gates-apologizes-to-production-partners-over-finding-your-roots-controversy/ : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - contemporaneous reporting on the 2015 controversy]; Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk".

198. Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk".

199. Sefton, "Hacked Emails Imply Possible Censorship"; Sefton, "Affleck Admits Asking Gates"; Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk".

200. Sefton, "Hacked Emails Imply Possible Censorship"; Sefton, "Affleck Admits Asking Gates"; Albert, "Celebrity Genealogy Shows".

201. Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk".

202. Research log, 19 August 2026.

203. THIRTEEN, "About African American Lives"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3"; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

204. Gates, Finding Your Roots, 2014; Gates, Finding Your Roots, Season 2; WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots".

205. WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots".

206. Kramer, "Mediatizing Memory".

207. Keatley et al., "You Need This Knowledge"; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

208. WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots"; Kramer, "Mediatizing Memory"; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season".

209. THIRTEEN, "Kathleen Henderson"; THIRTEEN, "About African American Lives 2," n.d. (https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/about.html : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for the African American Lives 2 format and outreach].

210. THIRTEEN, "Kathleen Henderson".

211. THIRTEEN, "Kathleen Henderson"; THIRTEEN, "About African American Lives 2".

212. "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots, season 10; Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

213. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

214. Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

215. "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots, season 10; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

216. "Finding Your Own Roots: 8 Tips for Getting Started," Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., PBS, video posted 10 March 2022 (https://www.pbs.org/video/finding-your-own-roots-9nqgll/ : accessed 19 August 2026); PBS, "Finding Your Roots" program page.

217. Nina G. Jablonski, "Finding Your Roots Curriculum," Pennsylvania State University, n.d. (https://sites.psu.edu/ninajablonski/finding-your-roots/ : accessed 19 August 2026).

218. Harvard Gazette, "Finding Your Roots School Curriculum Receives $659,000," 3 November 2015 (https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/11/finding-your-roots-school-curriculum-receives-659000/ : accessed 19 August 2026). [HISTORICAL - used for 2015 curriculum grants only].

219. Harvard Gazette, "School Curriculum Receives $659,000"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

220. PBS Books, "Finding Your Roots National Conversation Series"; WETA, "WETA Final Engagement Reports," digital archive listing Finding Your Roots Seasons 3-12, n.d. (https://brandfolder.com/weta/weta-final-engagement-reports : accessed 19 August 2026); WETA, "The Inkwell Society," donor program page, n.d. (https://weta.org/inkwellsociety : accessed 19 August 2026).

221. "Finding Your Own Roots," PBS video; Jablonski, "Finding Your Roots Curriculum"; PBS Books, "Finding Your Roots National Conversation Series".

222. Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research".

223. McGee Media, "Finding Your Roots"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Eight"; Keatley et al., "You Need This Knowledge"; Gates, Finding Your Roots, 2014.

224. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?"; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship".

225. Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots"; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; PBS, "Finding Your Roots" program page.

226. Research log, 19 August 2026.

227. THIRTEEN, "Kathleen Henderson"; "Viewers Like You," Finding Your Roots, season 10; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

228. THIRTEEN, "About African American Lives"; WETA, "Season Five of Finding Your Roots"; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism".

229. McGee Media, "Finding Your Roots"; Kunhardt Films, "Finding Your Roots, Season 3"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots, Season Eight"; Keatley et al., "You Need This Knowledge".

230. Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Clarendon, "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA?".

231. Hautzinger, "How Genealogists Find Your Roots".

232. Sefton, "Hacked Emails Imply Possible Censorship"; Sefton, "Affleck Admits Asking Gates"; Sefton, "Gates Apologizes to Production Partners"; Sefton, "Upcoming Seasons at Risk".

233. Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Atlantic Philanthropies, "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots"; Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

234. Research log, 19 August 2026.

235. PBS, "Finding Your Roots, Season 12" press release; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

236. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024.

237. WNET, "Reach Record Number of Viewers"; Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

238. Research log, 19 August 2026.

239. Research log, 19 August 2026.

240. Research log, 19 August 2026.

241. Pond, "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

242. National Endowment for the Humanities, "NEH Award Search"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

243. Research log, 19 August 2026.

244. McGee Media, "Finding Your Roots"; Hendrickson, "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research"; Ford Motor Company, "Ford Supports Second Season"; WETA, "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship".

245. Public Broadcasting Service, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2024; WETA, Form 990, tax year ended 30 June 2025; Moore Foundation, "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots"; Research log, 19 August 2026.

Source list

Entries follow Evidence Explained-style source-list conventions. "HISTORICAL" flags are not judgments about reliability; they warn against using an older source as evidence of current conditions.

Producer, network, and station sources

Kunhardt Films. "Faces of America." Project page. N.d. https://kunhardtfilms.com/our-films/faces-of-america/.

Kunhardt Films. "Finding Your Roots, Season 3." Project page. N.d. https://kunhardtfilms.com/our-films/finding-your-roots-season-3/.

McGee Media. "Finding Your Roots." Program page. N.d. https://www.mcgeemedia.com/fyr.

PBS. "Finding Your Roots." Program page. N.d. https://www.pbs.org/show/finding-your-roots/.

PBS. "Genealogy Roadshow." Program page. N.d. https://www.pbs.org/show/genealogy-roadshow/.

THIRTEEN. "About African American Lives 2." N.d. https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/about.html. **[HISTORICAL - used for the African American Lives 2 format and outreach.]**

THIRTEEN. "About African American Lives." 2006. https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/2006/about.html. **[HISTORICAL - used for the 2006 program premise.]**

THIRTEEN. "African American Lives: A Q+A with Henry Louis Gates, Jr." 2006. https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/2006/print/p_profile_gates.html. **[HISTORICAL - used for the franchise origin and 2006 selection rationale.]**

THIRTEEN. "Kathleen Henderson." African American Lives 2 profile. N.d. https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/profiles/henderson.html. **[HISTORICAL - used for the 2008 viewer-selection precedent.]**

Wall to Wall. "Who Do You Think You Are?" Program page. N.d. https://www.walltowall.co.uk/program/4/who-do-you-think-you-are.

Press releases

PBS. "Finding Your Roots Season 11 Trailer Press Release." 2024. PDF. https://pressroom.pbs.org/-/media/pressroom/public-assets/programs/finding-your-roots/finding-your-roots-s11-trailer-press-release.pdf.

PBS. "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Season 12 Trailer Release." Press release. 8 October 2025. PDF. https://pressroom.pbs.org/-/media/pressroom/public-assets/programs/finding-your-roots/fyr-s12-trailer-release.pdf.

PBS. "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Season Nine." Press release. 2022. DOCX. https://pressroom.pbs.org/-/media/pressroom/public-assets/programs/finding-your-roots/910-out-of-the-past/fyr9_tca-press-release_final_rsvd.docx.

WETA. "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Season Eight Premieres January 2022." Press release. N.d. https://weta.org/press/finding-your-roots-henry-louis-gates-jr-season-eight-premieres-january-2022.

WETA. "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Season Seven Premieres January 19, 2021." Press release. N.d. https://weta.org/sites/default/files/press/FYR7_release.pdf. **[HISTORICAL - used for Season 7 framing and credits only.]**

WETA. "Season Five of Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Premieres Winter 2019 on PBS." Press release. N.d. https://weta.org/press/season-five-finding-your-roots-henry-louis-gates-jr-premieres-winter-2019-pbs-beginning. **[HISTORICAL - used for Season 5 framing and credits only.]**

WETA. "Season Six of Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Premieres Fall 2019 and Airs Through Fall 2020." Press release. 29 July 2019 https://weta.org/press/season-six-finding-your-roots-henry-louis-gates-jr-premieres-fall-2019-and-airs-through-fall. **[HISTORICAL - used for Season 6 credits only.]**

WKNO. "Finding Your Roots, Season 4." Program page and funding credits. N.d. https://www.wkno.org/local-pbs-shows/finding-your-roots/season-4/. **[HISTORICAL - used for Season 4 funding credits only.]**

WNET. "PBS Series American Masters and Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Reach Record Number of Viewers." Press release. 26 July 2012. https://www.wnet.org/2012/07/26/pbs-series-american-masters-and-finding-your-roots-with-henry-louis-gates-jr-reach-record-number-of-viewers/. **[HISTORICAL - used for Season 1 audience and funding credits only.]**

Television broadcasts and videos

"Finding Your Own Roots: 8 Tips for Getting Started." Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. PBS. Video posted 10 March 2022. https://www.pbs.org/video/finding-your-own-roots-9nqgll/.

"Viewers Like You." Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Season 10, episode 10. PBS. Broadcast 9 April 2024. Streaming preview and program page. https://www.pbs.org/video/viewers-like-you-preview/.

Interviews and news reporting

Ashkenazy, Daniella Weiss. "What Programs like Finding Your Roots Miss - and How I Tracked Down My Own Family's History." The Forward. 15 February 2022. https://forward.com/culture/482550/what-programs-like-finding-your-roots-miss-and-how-i-tracked-down-my-own/.

Clarendon, Dan. "Do Finding Your Roots Celeb Guests Give DNA? Questions Answered About the PBS Series." TV Insider. 14 December 2024. https://www.tvinsider.com/1165703/finding-your-roots-pbs-production-questions-answered/.

Hautzinger, Daniel. "How Genealogists Find Your Roots." WTTW. 2 October 2017. https://www.wttw.com/playlist/2017/09/29/how-genealogists-find-your-roots. **[HISTORICAL - used for contemporaneous Season 4 research-labor evidence.]**

Hendrickson, Paula. "How Finding Your Roots Turns DNA Research Into Essential TV." Television Academy. 9 April 2024. https://www.televisionacademy.com/features/news/online-originals/finding-your-roots-pbs-dna-genetic-research-interview.

Keatley, Avery; Sarah McCammon; Jeanette Woods; and Jason Fuller. "You Need This Knowledge, Says Henry Louis Gates Jr. as New Season of Finding Your Roots Premieres." NPR. 17 January 2026. Transcript hosted by WLRN. https://www.wlrn.org/npr-breaking-news/2026-01-17/you-need-this-knowledge-says-henry-louis-gates-jr-as-new-season-of-finding-your-roots-premieres.

Pond, Steve. "How Finding Your Roots Fights Racism One Family Tree at a Time." TheWrap. 19 August 2024. https://www.thewrap.com/finding-your-roots-henry-louis-gates-jr-fights-racism/.

Sefton, Dru. "Affleck Admits Asking Gates to Omit Family's Slave-Owning Past from Finding Your Roots." Current. 22 April 2015. https://current.org/2015/04/affleck-admits-asking-gates-to-omit-familys-slave-owning-past-from-finding-your-roots/. **[HISTORICAL - contemporaneous reporting on the 2015 controversy.]**

Sefton, Dru. "Gates Apologizes to Production Partners over Finding Your Roots Controversy." Current. 23 April 2015. https://current.org/2015/04/gates-apologizes-to-production-partners-over-finding-your-roots-controversy/. **[HISTORICAL - contemporaneous reporting on the 2015 controversy.]**

Sefton, Dru. "Hacked Emails Imply Possible Finding Your Roots Censorship by Gates." Current. 18 April 2015. https://current.org/2015/04/hacked-emails-imply-possible-finding-your-roots-censorship-by-gates/. **[HISTORICAL - contemporaneous reporting on the 2015 controversy.]**

Sefton, Dru. "Upcoming Seasons of Finding Your Roots at Risk after PBS Investigation." Current. 25 June 2015. https://current.org/2015/06/upcoming-seasons-of-finding-your-roots-at-risk-after-pbs-investigation/. **[HISTORICAL - contemporaneous reporting on the 2015 PBS investigation.]**

Corporate and underwriting sources

23andMe. "23andMe Provides the Science Behind PBS Series Finding Your Roots." Press release. 9 April 2012. https://www.23andme.org/media-center/press-releases/23andme-provides-the-science-behind-pbs-series-finding-your-roots/. **[HISTORICAL - used for the 2012 technical collaboration only.]**

AARP. "Finding Your Roots: Bob Odenkirk and Iliza Shlesinger." Sponsor article. 2024. https://www.aarp.org/entertainment/television/finding-your-roots-bob-odenkirk-iliza-shlesinger/.

Ancestry. "Finding Your Roots Season 12 Premiere." Ancestry Blog. 2026. https://www.ancestry.com/c/ancestry-blog/entertainment-and-culture/finding-your-roots-season-12-premiere.

Ancestry. "Who Do You Think You Are?" Program page. N.d. https://www.ancestry.com/c/who-do-you-think-you-are.

Ford Motor Company. "Ford Supports Second Season of Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on PBS." Press release. 12 September 2014. PR Newswire. https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/ford-supports-second-season-of-finding-your-roots-with-henry-louis-gates-jr-on-pbs-274892411.html. **[HISTORICAL - used for the 2014 sponsorship activation only.]**

WETA. "Corporate Sponsorship." N.d. https://weta.org/support/corporate.

WETA. "Finding Your Roots Sponsorship." Corporate sponsorship page. N.d. https://weta.org/sponsorship/shows/finding-your-roots.

Financial filings and grant records

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. "Grant Detail: Finding Your Roots." Grant database. Awards dated October 2020, July 2023, September 2023, and October 2024. https://moore.org/grant-detail?grantId=GBMF12923.

Greater Washington Educational Telecommunications Association, Inc. (WETA). IRS Form 990. Tax year 1 July 2023-30 June 2024. Digital image. https://weta.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/2023-WETA-Form%20990%20Public%20Disclosure.pdf.

Greater Washington Educational Telecommunications Association, Inc. (WETA). IRS Form 990. Tax year 1 July 2024-30 June 2025. Digital image. https://weta.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/2024-WETA-990-%20Public%20DIsclosure.pdf.

National Endowment for the Humanities. "NEH Award Search." Grant database. https://awardsearch.neh.gov/.

Public Broadcasting Service. IRS Form 990. Tax year 1 July 2023-30 June 2024. Digital image. GuideStar. https://pdf.guidestar.org/PDF_Images/2024/520/899/2024-520899215-202501299349303195-9.pdf.

The Atlantic Philanthropies. "Faces of America: Finding Our Roots." Grant record. 2011. $400,000; 12 months. https://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/grants/faces-of-america-finding-our-roots. **[HISTORICAL - used for the 2011 development grant only.]**

Education and outreach sources

Harvard Gazette. "Finding Your Roots School Curriculum Receives $659,000." 3 November 2015. https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/11/finding-your-roots-school-curriculum-receives-659000/. **[HISTORICAL - used for 2015 curriculum grants only.]**

Jablonski, Nina G. "Finding Your Roots Curriculum." Pennsylvania State University. N.d. https://sites.psu.edu/ninajablonski/finding-your-roots/.

PBS Books. "Finding Your Roots National Conversation Series." N.d. https://www.pbsbooks.org/finding-your-roots-national-conversation-series/.

WETA. "The Inkwell Society." Donor program page. N.d. https://weta.org/inkwellsociety.

WETA. "WETA Final Engagement Reports." Digital archive. N.d. https://brandfolder.com/weta/weta-final-engagement-reports.

Books and scholarship

Albert, Jessica. "Celebrity Genealogy Shows - They're Not Just Like Us." History Associates. 3 June 2025. https://www.historyassociates.com/celebrity-genealogy-shows/.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. Finding Your Roots, Season 2: The Official Companion to the PBS Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. **[HISTORICAL - used for the Season 2 companion-book framing.]**

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. Finding Your Roots: The Official Companion to the PBS Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. **[HISTORICAL - used for the companion-book framing of Seasons 1-2.]**

Kramer, Anne-Marie. "Mediatizing Memory: History, Affect and Identity in Who Do You Think You Are?" European Journal of Cultural Studies 14 (2011). doi:10.1177/1367549411404616. **[HISTORICAL - analytical scholarship on the celebrity-genealogy genre.]**

Lenart-Cheng, Helga. "Platform Authority on Prime Time: PBS's Finding Your Roots and the Televisual Production of Genetic Truth." Television & New Media. Published online 31 July 2026. doi:10.1177/15274764261468216.

Research documentation

Research log for this report. 19 August 2026. Searches of PBS, WETA, CPB, NEH, IRS/GuideStar, foundation grant databases, trade press, and producer websites. Unpublished electronic research notes in the author's possession.

* * *

Author's Note: I want to be transparent that this content – ***WHY FINDING YOUR ROOTS CASTS CELEBRITIES.*** – was created in part with the help of an artificial intelligence (AI) language model – **ChatGPT Business Pro 5**. The AI assisted in generating the research content, but every paragraph was subsequently reviewed and fact-checked for accuracy. The final content is presented "as is" and utilizes the best possible publicly-available information as of publication date.