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Africana
dot sold

Marketing Prof. Gates

BY MATTHEW BENJAMIN

Don't call him just a college professor. Internet entrepreneur, TV personality, adviser to presidents, and friend to the rich and powerful would be more accurate.

Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr. is better known for his activities outside the academy. This week he sold *Africana.com*, a Web site he created with a fellow Harvard University professor, to Time Warner. Terms of the deal weren't revealed, though the *Wall Street Journal* pegged the price at more than \$10

AFRICANA.COM

million, with Gates reaping up to \$1 million. Time Warner will incorporate the site, a portal with news and information about people of African descent, into America Online when the two merge as expected. The sense is that Gates got a very good deal. The site is a rich source of scholarship but hardly a rich source of revenue.

As recently as the late 1980s Gates, who turns 50 this week, was an obscure professor, penning books on literary theory only a graduate student could love. Now he can't be avoided: He hosted a series about Africa on public television, writes occasional articles for the *New Yorker*, and even advises the Gore presidential campaign. He counts director Steven Spielberg, Microsoft's Bill Gates and President Clinton as friends. "They're not intimate friends," he insists.

Indeed, Gates has evolved into a kind of



Henry Louis Gates

expert on everything African-American. "He remains the go-to person on the state of African-American affairs," said Perry Steinberg, head of American Program Bureau, a lecture agency. The 30 or so speeches Gates delivers each year are another source of income for the professor.

With fame comes controversy. Several other black intellectuals have taken him to task for not being confrontational enough. Gates has heard it before. "Me? Critics? Oh, what a shock." But he considers himself more a descendent of historian and educator W. E. B. Du Bois than of Malcolm X. His ultimate goal is to build the field of Afro-American studies. "Fifty years from now I want there to be at least 10 great centers of Afro-American studies," he says.

If working as a consultant on Spielberg's historical film *Amistad* or giving Al Gore advice helps, so be it. ●