

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

W. E. B. DU BOIS INSTITUTE FOR AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN RESEARCH
DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Barker Center • 12 Quincy Street • Cambridge, MA 02138-3879

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Acclaimed Historian Gary Nash Discusses the African American Experience During the Early Republic

Cambridge – On November 8-10, 2004, Gary Nash, one of the nation's leading and most controversial historians discusses the African American experience in early American history at the Nathan I. Huggins Lectures, a three-day lecture series taking place at Harvard University.

In the first lecture of the series on November 8, entitled "The Black Americans' Revolution," Nash discusses why the slave struggle for freedom was the largest rebellion in American history and why slaves willingness to fight for Britain during the Revolutionary War has been suppressed for so long in historical accounts of the period. In the second lecture on November 9, Nash challenges the notion that the abolition of slavery in the revolutionary era was impossible due the fragility of the new republic and the economic obstacles posed by the emancipation of half a million slaves. He argues that an unusual convergence of factors in the immediate post-war period made abolition a real possibility. Nash also asserts that the lack of leadership from the Founding Fathers especially Franklin, Adams, Washington, Jefferson and Madison created an environment that kept abolitionism from moving forward in the 1790's. In the final lecture on November 10, Nash picks up where he left off and argues that the waning abolitionist movement laid the groundwork for its foes to attack black citizenship during the early 1800's and as a result spawned the rise of black militant activism in the 1820's.

Nash has been a professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles since 1966. From 1992 to 1996, he co-chaired the controversial National History Standards Project, which landed him in the middle of ideological debates about how history should be taught, whose history should be taught, and the merits of multiculturalism in the classroom.

The controversy surrounding the Standards came to light again earlier this month, when the *Los Angeles Times* reported that complaints by Lynne Cheney, the wife of the Vice-President Dick Cheney and a vociferous critic of the Standards for "politicizing history" led to the destruction of 300,000 copies of the booklet, "Helping Your Child Learn History." About the destruction of the booklets, Nash told the *Los Angeles Times*, "That's a pretty god-awful example of spending the taxpayers' money and also a pretty god-awful example of interference — intellectual interference. If that's not Big Brother or Big Sister, I don't know what is."

The Nathan I. Huggins Lectures are named after the first W. E. B. Du Bois Professor at Harvard and honor the memory and contributions of Nathan I. Huggins (1927–1989). Huggins served as the chair of the Department of Afro-American Studies from 1980 to 1984 and between 1987 and 1989. Professor Huggins also served as the director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research between 1980 and 1989. Co-sponsored by the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, the Department of African and African American

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Studies, and Harvard University Press, the lectures were designed to bring distinguished scholars to deliver three lectures on a topic related to African American history.

Who: Gary Nash, Professor Emeritus of History, Director, National Center for History in the Schools, University of California, Los Angeles.

What: Nathan I. Huggins Lecture Series: African Americans in the Age of Revolution

The Black Americans' Revolution

Rethinking the Unthinkable: Could the Founding Fathers Have Abolished Slavery?

Race, Citizenship, and National Identity in the Early Republic.

When and Where: Monday, November 8; Tuesday, November 9 and Wednesday, November 10. All lectures take place from 4 PM – 5:30 PM in the Thompson Room, Barker Center, 12 Quincy Street. A reception follows each lecture. Free, open to the public and wheel-chair accessible. For more information, please call 617.495.3611.

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