Birth of a flashpoint: Gates’s neighbor captured the moment – The Boston Globe

Gates’s neighbor captured the moment
His photo of arrest has made rounds of media outlets

This image of Henry Louis Gates Jr. at his Cambridge home has earned more than $4,000 for the photographer and the agency he hired. (Bill Carter/ Demotix Images)

By Jack Nicas
Globe Correspondent / July 23, 2009

It started as a passing snapshot. But it became the essential image of a story that everyone seems to have an opinion about.

William B. Carter was headed out from his home on Ware Street in Cambridge for his daily coffee and crossword puzzle at Au Bon Pain in Harvard Square on Thursday, when he saw a commotion four doors down.

Carter, a 58-year-old former manager at Bank of America, said he saw four police officers on the porch and “at least six or seven police cars” in the street.

“So I grabbed my camera, because when you see police, you know something’s going on.”

Something was.

Moments later, Carter snapped the only known photograph of a handcuffed Henry Louis Gates Jr. Carter said Gates was “agitated” as police led him off to face a charge of disorderly conduct.

“I had no idea who he was,” Carter said. “I just took one picture of him . . . and was on my way.”

That photograph has made the media rounds, popping up on the Internet; on television, including CNN, NBC, and CBS; and in such newspapers as USA Today, The Washington Post, The Boston Globe, and the Guardian in England.

“Thought it was an interesting story. I knew who he was,” he said, “but I didn’t expect it to get as big as it did.”

Thus far, the photo has earned over $4,000, said Carter, who will reap half of everything Demotix collects for its use.

After Carter took the photo, he showed it to his wife, who also didn’t recognize Gates. The weekend passed and the couple had forgotten about the episode, until late Monday night.

That evening, the couple’s street was lined with news vans, and they soon realized the significance of the image in his camera.

Carter found the Demotix website that night; the image went around the world the next morning.

The incident has been a point of discourse across the country, and Carter also has an opinion.

“I know he was tired and upset, but someone of his stature and education should be a little more understanding,” he said.

Carter said the incident will change one thing about him: “I’m going to take my camera with me everywhere as best I can from now on.”

He promises the international attention won’t go to his head.

“I imagine it’s just my 15 minutes of fame,” he said. “It’ll blow over soon.”

© Copyright 2009 Globe Newspaper Company.

Start your week off right with in-depth coverage. Subscribe now to the Globe.

Reader Comments » View reader comments () » Comment on this story »

Most E-mailed

1. Museum of Science to host Harry Potter exhibit
2. Obama: Cambridge police acted ‘stupidly’ in Gates arrest
3. Machismo and the Gates incident
5. Watson looks to rebound at Senior British Open
6. Summer alphabet soup
7. Sox to retire Rice’s number

Recommended Searches

- Weather
- Food section
- Recipes Summer salads
- Obituaries
- Dermatologist
- Fishing charters

About this List