

# [***Gayle King Is Not Just Oprah's Best Friend, She's America's Best Friend***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BFM-7RT1-DY68-11CW-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

March 1, 2024 Friday 4:00 AM EST

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**Length:** 3029 words

**Byline:** H. Alan Scott

**Highlight:** "I say this all the time, I have a front-row seat to history. And I like it," Gayle King told Newsweek's H. Alan Scott about her work.

**Body**

**"I say this all the time, 'I have a front-row seat to history.' And I like it."**

Whatever you do, don't call [*Gayle King*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/gayle-king?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) an icon. "Diana Ross, to me, is an icon." Fair. But one moniker she is fine with is America's best friend. "I'll take that as a compliment. I like that." And it fits, considering her many titles: center anchor of [*CBS*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/cbs?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) *Mornings*, editor at large of *Oprah Daily*, co-host of [*CNN*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/cnn?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s *King Charles*. "If I get five [hours of sleep], I'm doing the hula." At *CBS Mornings*, it's the combination of King, Tony Dokoupil and Nate Burleson that creates a dynamic unlike any other morning show. "We can educate, we can inform and entertain without being a comedy show. Clearly, people like watching people that they think enjoy working with each other. We certainly have that down on lock. But I think that we each bring something different to the table." Even though she says she's not "out here looking for more work," she's also never going to turn down an opportunity. "I never have, and I'm not going to start now; I just have so many varied interests. That has served me well. I say this all the time, 'I have a front-row seat to history.'"

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*Editor's Note: This conversation has been edited and condensed for publication.*

**I have to start things off by telling you how much I love *CBS Mornings*. I always tell friends, I start every day with my Gayle.**

Please spread the word.

**Well, it feels like people are catching on. It's doing great in the ratings.**

The beauty is certainly we got a big assist from the Super Bowl. No question about that. But then people come in, they try it and they like it. So far, so good.

**I also think it's the combination of you, Tony Dokoupil and Nate Burleson and that there's a focus on the news. It's a different type of morning show.**

And I think it's our content, too. Clearly, people like watching people that they think like each other and enjoy working with each other. We certainly have that down on lock. I think when you look at all the morning shows, everybody seems to get along and work well with each other. But I think that we each bring something different to the table. Nate, he's our fashionista and our swagger, and he's also uniquely himself. The same with Tony. Nobody beats Tony when it comes to interviews—those man-on-the-street interviews that he does. His background is writing, he's a very strong writer. And I like doing [them]—whether it's pop culture, whether it's ***politics***, whether it's sports, whether it's business, I just have so many varied interests in all different types of things. I think that has served me well over the years. This is the thing, I don't think you can pigeonhole any of us. That's the beauty, I think.

**It's true, but it's also how Tony and Nate react to you. On one hand, there's this reverence they have for you, rightfully so because you are an icon. But then there's this reaction they have when you say the thing we're all thinking at home, catching them off guard. It makes them playfully uncomfortable, and it's just great television.**

I'm not trying to make anybody feel uncomfortable ever. And anytime someone says the word "icon" or "legend," it makes me extremely, extremely uncomfortable. I was on a stage once, ready to go on after Diana Ross, I was introducing somebody after Diana Ross. Now Diana Ross, to me, is an icon or a legend. So when I hear my name associated with that word, it makes me extremely uncomfortable. Because that's not at all how I feel. I feel that I've been doing this for a long time and clearly love what I do and still feel there's still so much more to do, you know? I do think they [Dokoupil and Burleson] get a kick out of me. Nate said the other day, we were talking about something, and he said, "Oh, my God, Gayle, you so crazy." I go, "I'm not crazy, that's the truth."

**Well, just to give you an example, I told a friend I was speaking with you, and immediately he went, "cheater, cheater, pumpkin eater," something you say often related to stories about cheating. So it's that casual response to things, it's very relatable, and quotable.**

But you know what I mean, though, when I say "cheater, cheater, pumpkin eater." Like my new thing right now, I said to the team this morning, "You gotta get that Reesa Teesa on [*TikTok*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/tiktok?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)." Who has a whole thing about who the bleep did I marry? Turns out she was married to a cheater, cheater pumpkin eater who deceived her on many levels. And it's just blowing up, and I'm so fascinated by this woman exposing herself this way. But she says, if it helps one woman, I'm okay with it.

**I have to go back to the icon thing, because I often feel like icons don't personally feel like they're icons.**

Barbra Streisand feels like an icon.

**Well, yes, but she felt like an icon in the '60s, too. [*laughs*]**

She just got the Life Achievement Award at the SAG Awards. I thought she looked great, too. She looked very much the icon and legend that she is. And I love how even in that moment when she's being celebrated, she said, "I want to thank all of you for giving me such joy." I thought that was so fantastic.

**And I think that's what icons do. They're self-aware of the people who have influenced them and made them great. And with you, listen, I love morning news and daytime TV, and I've always felt like you're America's best friend.**

Well I'll take that as a compliment. I like that, I like that.

**And you find this balance between personality and asking the hard questions. How do you find that balance?**

Well because both are true. It's not like I'm sitting here going, how do I balance this? To me, both are true. And so, when you're having a conversation, if it comes up, it comes up, I'm never trying to think "How can I insert a funny line here?" It's just that if it strikes me in the moment, I just go with it. I'm not trying to balance anything to be honest with you. I'm a news junkie, been a news junkie for a very long time, and the news covers everything.

**You do have to cover some heavy stuff, and it's all about balance. Like I look to Tony Dokoupil for the journalism and Nate Burleson to offer that lived experience and you to offer the heart, to give that authentic response. Considering that, do you ever question how much of yourself to reveal in your response to a news item?**

No, nope, I don't think that. I've gotten my hand slapped a couple of times, where people will say, "Careful Gayle, careful." Because we're not supposed to have an opinion, as you know, and we really do work from the facts, just the facts, nothing but the facts. And for the most part, that is what I do. But I also know I'm a human being, I'm not a robot. And so anybody that acts like they don't have an opinion, because all of us do, it's just that it's not my job to share it. But sometimes it just gets to you. The [*George Floyd*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/george-floyd?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) case got to me in a way that it hit me because it did come back to back with the Central Park birder Chris Cooper [who] Amy Cooper had called the police [on], and it could have gone very differently for him. Just a white woman accusing a Black man of something that he did not do. So that, followed by George Floyd, where we watched a man literally lose his life right before our eyes. That just got to me. It was a one-two punch on that Memorial Day weekend. This morning, the story that got to me was this nursing student in Georgia, 22 years old [Laken Riley, murdered on February 22] just jogging around the track that she's done many times, and the person who was arrested didn't even know her, it was a crime of opportunity. That's just such a horrible, sh\*\*\*\* thing, that there's no explanation. There's no explanation for it. That kind of stuff gets to me.

**And that's what is so great about *CBS Mornings*, it's hard news. Of course you have the fun segments, but not like other morning shows do.**

We do do that. We can educate, we can inform and entertain without being a comedy show. I'm very well aware I'm not a comedian. I'm not trying to make anybody laugh. It was two years, on Friday was [the anniversary of the] war in Ukraine. People are still dying. They're still dying. And it's coming back to the front page because they need money. But I keep thinking about those poor people where someone just said, I'm gonna come in and take your country and kill you in the process. It's mind-boggling to me. ***Politics*** in this country, where you have parties on both sides that really don't care for either one of the candidates and here we are in an election year. I mean, there's just a lot to discuss. I say this all the time, "I have a front-row seat to history." And I like it.

**You joined *CBS Mornings* in 2011. You were at a point in your career, with a show on OWN and an editor at large at *O, The Oprah Magazine*, where you really didn't need CBS.**

I was very happy with the job I had. That's why people say, God can dream a bigger dream than you can dream for yourself. I could have never dreamt this. Never. I was very happy with my life and what I was doing.

**That's just it. Here you are at your age, leading this morning show, having this second act to an already impressive career. It's inspirational for a lot of people. Do you recognize that?**

Yeah, I mean, Walter Cronkite had to retire from CBS at 65. He had to retire. Thank you very much Uncle Walter, time to go. He didn't want to go. He didn't want to go at 65. I wasn't even kind of thinking about retirement [at 65]. I'm not even kind of thinking about retiring now. I just started *King Charles* [on CNN with Charles Barkley] this year. Neither Charles Barkley or I were looking for another job. But we were intrigued about working with each other. That was sort of the hook for me. It's one day a week, and I said, "Well, let's try it and see how it goes. Let's try that." But it's not like I'm out here looking for more work. I'm not. But when you get offered unique opportunities, I say never turn down an opportunity. Never. I never have, and I'm not going to start now.

**I mean, between *CBS Mornings*, *King Charles* and your work as editor at large for *Oprah Daily*, do you ever sleep?**

I do. I wear my [*Apple*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/apple?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) watch, so I can tell you how much sleep I'm not getting. I saw a thing on Sunday morning about these people who are short sleepers; I wonder if I'm one of those.

**I think I am, because I average five hours a night.**

If I get five, I'm doing the hula. Mine is between four and five.

**Do you nap at all?**

No. It's hard. I think sometimes if you nap at the wrong time, it's like lights out. I come from the power-through school.

**Well, it's working for you, because *King Charles* is fantastic. What about doing it excited you?**

It was as simple as, you all are going to talk about the news, give your take on the news, you'll have guests, and it's with Charles Barkley. I had met him, but I can't say I was hanging out with Charles Barkley. But I've always liked his sense of humor. I've always liked his point of view. He's very authentic, says what he believes. He's never trying to get clickbait or be provocative just for the sake of being provocative. He really calls it as he sees it. If you agree, fine. If you don't, that's also fine with him. I think we're both at a stage where neither of us felt like we had something to prove. We hope people like it, we really do. But I also understand that this is a business. And if CNN doesn't think it works for them, it'll be, "Gayle, was very nice knowing you, thank you so much for coming. Here, we have a parting gift." [*laughs*]

**I don't think that's going to happen anytime soon.**

I mean, this is a crazy business, you never know. You never know. But he and I are both really enjoying it and always trying to think of ways to make it better.

**Did you see the *Saturday Night Live* sketch? I mean, if they're doing you on *SNL*, you're doing something right.**

I didn't see it in real time. It's one of those things where you sort of grip the side of the thing and go, "Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God." But what you just said, even if they slam you, it's still at least somebody's paying attention and more people watching. You don't want to be slammed. And the week before they had done something with [the] [*NFL*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/nfl?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), and Nate was on that. I think people like the three of us together. And they really liked the content of what we're doing. That's what I think is the magic of the show [*CBS Mornings*]. The three of us together. There is a magical thing there that works. People do tell me all the time, "I watch your show, I learned something." Or, "Every time I watch your show, I'm always curious about how you all will cover a certain story." Or, "I just like seeing the three of you together." I hear that a lot.

**Another big part of your current resume is *Oprah Daily*. Now, I need to confess, I was that homosexual in college who had a subscription to *O, The Oprah Magazine*, thank you very much. And I've been a subscriber to this day, even as the magazine shifted from print to digital *Oprah Daily*. I wanted to know what you thought of this new era for the publication?**

I have to tell you, we just had a meeting today actually, a little celebratory breakfast talking about the evolution of this platform. Print was very hard for me to let go. Yes. Oprah was there a couple years ago, "You guys, we got to start thinking about digital." I'm like, "No." She was there two years ago. I've come to grips with it. We're a digital platform, but we can also make a difference. But when you're digital, you can be more immediate, which is also good for us. So, when you think about this, H. Alan, the *Oprah* show has been off the air, I think it's 10 years now, and she still is held in such high regard and still really respected and her opinion still matters to people. Just this past weekend at the SAG Awards, Idris Elba said from the stage, "Now when you're up here, don't say anything you wouldn't say in front of Oprah." And he went [looking at Oprah], "Oh beep, it's Oprah!" Cut to Oprah's face going, "Huh?" because she didn't know that was coming. But I called her yesterday to say, number one, I thought she looked great at the SAG Awards. But it's a testament to what people think of you and how they believe in you, all these years later, the credibility that you have, the integrity that you have. Some shows go off the air, and you don't hear a beep from their host. Not a beep. Where are they? What are they doing? But she is still very much a part of the culture. And I like that.

**You know, I think about this often working for *Newsweek*. There's a long history attached to this brand, a respected history, and I'm always aware of that with the people I interview and the questions I want to ask. We're a legacy brand, and I want to be respectful of that. And in many ways, I think the same can be said of Oprah and the magazine.**

We are very much aware of that. We don't do schlocky stuff here. We touch on some pop culture in my monthly column, "The World According to Gayle," but for the most part, we are about wellness, we are about wholeness, we are about making sure is your soul okay, is your heart okay, is your head okay? And that message never gets old.

**Considering the work you've done with Oprah over the years, you must get asked about her all the time. Do you, and is there something you're sick of being asked about?**

You know, I never get sick of being asked about Oprah because I so love that she is loved the way she is. I so love that she is embraced the way she is. And it only makes me proud. I feel about Oprah the way I feel about [my] favorite son, Will, and [my] favorite daughter, Kirby, that I can't wait for people to meet them because they never disappoint me. So anytime someone gets to meet her or wants to ask me something about her, I don't have the hang-up, "Oh, God, I wish they'd stop asking me about Oprah." Because I don't. You would only feel that way if—and I've said this before—I don't see myself in her shadow. I see myself in her light. So anytime somebody says something about her, to me, I am never offended by that ever.

**That's so true. You know, when I was a kid, and I'm about to get personal, my parents divorced and my dad got custody of us. After school I would watch the *Oprah* show, and she kind of became a surrogate mother in a way, and you were a surrogate aunt of sorts.**

She was that for a lot of people, though, I mean, she was surrogate fill-in-the-blank for many people. The core of this girl has not changed from the time we were 21 and 22 [when] we became friends, and now we're 69 and 70. She's older. [*laughs*] But the core of who she is has not changed. She's always wanted to be a force for good, and that continues today.

**Well, I do need to inform you of something you may or may not be aware of, and that is you are clearly a gay icon.**

I think you're making stuff up. [*laughs*]

**No, no, I have proof. There are many moments on *CBS Mornings* where you go viral on predominantly gay social media platforms. For example, the very puffy gold coat you wore during the Super Bowl *CBS Mornings* broadcast.**

I called that my Liberace coat.

**Gayle, if you're calling it your Liberace coat, you shouldn't be surprised you're a gay icon.**

I'm just saying, it was the flair for the dramatic. I thought, if there ever was a time to wear it—I love that coat—I thought that would be a fun thing to wear in Vegas.

**Another example, on *Watch What Happens Live* when you were a guest with Anderson Cooper and asked something that resulted in Cooper spitting out his drink.**

I wasn't even trying to be funny. It was Anderson's reaction that was so funny. I'm also such a square that I'm like, "Huh?"

**Another example from your incredible interview with R. Kelly. Now that was a very serious interview, and you did an incredible job. But the moment you say, "Robert," in that deep, strict voice...it's something me and my friends just randomly quote to each other.**

H. Alan. Newsflash, that is his name.

**I know, I know, I'm just saying, if you get us quoting you, you're doing something right. Gayle, thank you for taking the time to speak with me.**

Thank you for picking me. I really appreciate it. We will continue at *CBS Mornings* and hopefully continue to make you proud because I love that job.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2355862/gayle-king-cbs-mornings.jpg)

**Graphic**

Gayle King CBS Mornings

Mary Kouw/CBS

CBS MORNINGS on January 9, 2024. Pictured: Gayle King. Photo: Mary Kouw/CBS ©2024 CBS Broadcasting, Inc. All Rights Reserved

**Load-Date:** March 1, 2024

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