

# MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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*I Am A Man*

Transcript

## INTRODUCTION

**ROLAND GILBERT:** They're born with it. They're born with creativity, love, openness, trust, curiosity, courage, leadership. They're born with that. It's what happens to them after they get here that changes that.

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** Does that mean you're about to be a father?

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** Yeah, I'm about to be a daddy, man.

**ROLAND GILBERT:** When you are a man, you don't need to prove it. You know it. You be it. You are it.

**UNKNOWN MALE (AUDIO CLIP):** Black masculinity is under attack.

**UNKNOWN MALE (AUDIO CLIP):** Men tend to not want to talk about some of these things because they do touch on core issues of identity in all of us as men, regardless of our race, have issues of our own anxiety and vulnerability that we don't want to acknowledge.

**UNKNOWN MALE (AUDIO CLIP):** People have an inherent notion that for some reason black men aren't worth saving. Whatever happens to them, they deserve it. They brought it on themselves.

**UNKNOWN MALE (AUDIO CLIP):** We have black men who are criminals. We have black men who are doctors. We have black men who are lawyers. Black men come in variety.

**UNKNOWN MALE (AUDIO CLIP):** You have denied his humanity. I guess these artists has demonstrated his humanity.

**UNKNOWN FEMALE (AUDIO CLIP):** Black men can't begin to liberate themselves without interrogating and questioning how sexism has shaped the nature of black masculinity.

**UNKNOWN MALE (AUDIO CLIP):** Manhood must continually be defined.

**BYRON HURT:** About two years ago, I started thinking about myself.

**BELL HOOKS:** The whole construction of black masculinity as we know it is so mired in patriarchal thinking. Within a white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy that black men can't begin to liberate themselves without interrogating and questioning how sexism has shaped the nature of black masculinity.

**BYRON HURT:** When I say myself, I mean me and other brothers like me.

**MICHAEL ERIC DYSON:** So to be a black man means that as a man we identify somewhat with white men. That is, we understand what it means to be male, what it means to undergo a variety of changes to come to one's own sense of self.

**BYRON HURT:** Days and nights I've wondered how I cope with being black and male in America. I wondered, how did the first black man feel when he was trapped and shipped to America?

**JOHN HENRICK CLARKE:** In the midst of this tragedy, first he was trying to figure it out. He had no mental preparation for this event. So his feeling was of uncertainty.

**BYRON HURT:** How has white patriarchal culture shaped my thinking?

**ANDREW YOUNG:** One of the things that people have done in every form of slavery is try to rob the male of his masculinity. You see that in the Bible where they kill the first born male.

**ALVIN POUSSAINT, M.D.:** So then it became necessary to make sure the black male was under control.

**DRILL SERGENT #1:** Man, pull your code, man. I ain't your dead doggone son. You better get some doggone discipline, you understand me? I am not going to put up with your crap.

**DRILL SERGENT #2:** Do you understand that?

**CADET:** Sir, yes sir.

**DRILL SERGENT #1:** Man.

**DRILL SERGENT #2:** You ain't back on no street. Roll your eyes. Be sorry for yourself.

**DAVID LEWIS:** You came up with this person that came out of the slave master's mentality that this man that was putting his foot in your behind was a real man, and for him to do that was masculine.

**MICHAEL ERIC DYSON:** On the other hand, we define ourselves against white men. We don't have the privileges that they have. We don't share the tremendous opportunities that are given to them at birth by virtue of white skin privilege.

**BELL HOOKS:** There is this sense in the culture that black masculinity represents a threat to the well being of everybody. Let's put it in check. Through prisons, through militarism, through anything that puts it in check.

**RICHARD MAJORS, PH. D:** We, unlike white males, had to earn our masculinity. We could not take it for granted. Oftentimes, masculinity was denied us. We were isolated. We were alienated. We couldn't be providers of our own families. We couldn't feel good about our accomplishments. We couldn't feel good about being men. So I think that for our unique history, masculinity, because it wasn't a birthright, it was something we had to earn, it was like a red badge of courage.

**BYRON HURT:** Why is that so important to men, to masculinity, to be a man? In other words, is it that important for a white man to be cool on the streets and to maintain and have the biggest guns?

**ANTHONY WILLIAMS:** No. They can be corny. They can be nerdy all their lives. Know what I'm saying? Go to school, get their education. When it comes to brothers, man. It's always an issue. I guess because brothers don't have nothing.

**RICHARD MAJORS, PH. D:** I think that you know masculinity, because of the difficulties of being able to attain a sense of masculinity because of our past, it became the most important thing to us.

## THE DILEMMA'S OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN AMERICA

**BYRON HURT:** Take a look at black men. Don't you know why we hurt? Why we rage, why we laugh, why we cry? Why we love, why we kill, why we live? Why we die? And so it is, within the context of America, that I began my journey through our space and through our time, the wilderness of black masculinity.

**JOHN THOMAS CADE:** We got men walking the streets just like me. Our children are in need. Women here to hold, what's going on? The rich get rich. The poor get sick. And everybody's saying, you can make it, don't quit.

**BYRON HURT:** In my travels, I spoke to brothers, young and old, about manhood, about masculinity, and what it means to be a black man in America.

**MICHAEL ERIC DYSON:** In American culture, because our masculine identity, our ability to claim ourselves to be men is predicated upon our abilities to be employed, to take care of our children, to take care of our wives, to take care of our daughters and sons, to be coworkers with our mates to somehow make a better life. Because of the enormous difficulties either at the job where one has so-called success and yet face tremendous odds or because one is unemployed, that challenges one's own manhood.

**DERRICK GOODSON:** This is being a man. And this is being a man.

**LESLIE JACKSON:** To prove yourself to be a man, you know, that doesn't mean the number of children that you father. It doesn't mean the amount of physique that you can accumulate on your body. It doesn't mean the macho-ness or else the whatever, whatever you want to call it. None of those things to me.

**ANTHONY WILLIAMS:** Funny thing about the black, you know, about brothers and shit. I always known that you got to fight to earn yours, know what I'm saying? Around my way, brothers got their respect by how many guns they had, how fast they could pull the trigger, how much drugs they sold, what kind of car they were driving, how many girls they was with. It was never ever an issue of your intellect.

**CONRAD MENEIDE:** Brothers get up everyday and feel like no one paying no attention to you. A lot of times a family's broken up. I mean, the schools, we lose interest because it's not really telling us what we want to hear. You go look for the job, and it's the same old same old. They look at you like you just ain't worth giving it to, a lot of times brothers don't want to settle for a Burger King or McDonalds. They can for the time being, but when you look in the long run, ten years from now, a lot of brothers don't see nothing happening for them. So their resolve to having this other brothers, this gang, this family, that really stand up and take you in and treat you like you a man, and you start getting that respect back.

**MARQUIS (The J.A.C.):** The reason why it really originated was the idea of three guys from our neighborhood, which is Berkeley, you know, and these three guys, one of them being him and one of them being a member that's not here and one that's in custody. And these three guys, they have a reputation for being able to fight very well. So the idea is these two guys --. Recently they wasn't friends. They just knew each other. We all got together, we grew up knowing each other, and it was an idea that these three guys need to hook up, build something, and do something. Where we from, people is constantly getting robbed. That's one of the reasons why we got this family together to protect us.

**BYRON HURT:** This film that I'm producing is about black masculinity. It's about the storm that we feel inside, the storm that rages inside many black males. This bridge that I'm standing by, it represents the bridge that most black men are trying to build between

themselves and masculinity, in trying to become a man and not knowing what it is to be a man.

**GAIL DINES, Ph. D:** Increasingly what we're seeing today, in movies and in the news, which is a major disseminator of the dominant ideology, you're seeing the black male as rapist, as drug abuser, as murderer. Basically, as a major threat to white suburban life.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** I'm walking to get in my mother's car. And this lady grabbed her pocket book, walked all the way around the car, walked across the street, got a quarter, came all the way back so she could put it in the meter.

**ALVIN POUSSAINT, MD:** When they're walking down the street, and they see a white male, even though white males mug and rape, they're not as likely to see that person as raping or mugging them and get scared.

**DAVID LEWIS:** I know how I look. I look stereotypical, like I'm gonna tear somebody's head off. People look at me when they first see me, that's the first thought that comes into mind. "Oh my god!"

**GAIL DINES, Ph. D:** The scariest thing to whites is basically African-Americans. They have been demonized through the media to this degree. When you speak to white people, the thing they fear most is African-Americans and African-American males more than women.

**DEREK BARTLETT:** A lot of whites act scary. They act real scary.

**INTERVIEWER:** How do people react to you when you walking down the street?

**DEREK BARTLETT:** That's what I'm talking about. Lock the doors, roll the windows up, grab your purse because that nigger over there is gonna grab it.

**ROLAND GILBERT:** We've always been put down by white society as a threat. Either we're violent brutes or we're shuffling sambos or something in between those two. So yes, it increases general feeling that blacks have a high rate of crime, they commit a lot of these crimes. More than half of jail inmates are black, and therefore you are at greater risk.

**RICHARD MAJORS, Ph. D:** I remember one white person telling me in grad school saying that essentially, he said, "Rich, and in all honesty, when I think about black men the first thing that comes to my mind is fear, is a mystique."

**JACKSON KATZ:** It would be unfair to underestimate just how powerful this bodily kind of sensibility is among white men that we are inferior to black men. That's a really deep and powerful thing, and it does, like I said, result in a lot of this unacknowledged and undiscussed anxiety. These are things that white men don't talk about.

**GAIL DINES, Ph. D:** I think when we do an analysis of cases, of high profile cases of African-American men who have transgressed, and there's all this discussion about are they guilty or not guilty. I think a much more interesting discussion in a lot of ways is, why did these become major cases? What is it about an African-American male transgressing that makes it so compelling to whites?

**JACKSON KATZ:** When there's a constant focus on African-American men as the violent men, one affect that that has is that it gives white men a pass. In other words, we don't have to take responsibility for our own violence in our own communities. I'm not talking about white racism or white violence necessarily against African-American people. I'm talking about white violence against white people, for instance, and white women, you know. So that the more the focus is on African-American men committing the violence, the easier it is for the dominant group in a society, white men, to put off violence onto the other. In other words, this violence is being caused by or perpetrated by the other.

**GAIL DINES, Ph. D:** So what you have is when a black male transgresses, the conversation can be around his blackness and not around his maleness. Now we can argue that O.J. Simpson killed his wife, not because he's a male. Not because we know that males do these things to women in patriarchy, but because he's black. We can basically short circuit any discussion of masculinity, and once again the image of a black male on trial for a crime, especially against white women, is such a perfect way of once again bombarding whites with the image of black male as violent.

**HERU-NEFERA AMEN:** It's a lie. Every time I see a documentary about violent black men, it's a lie. Every time I see a video, it's a lie. Every time I see a newspaper article, it's a lie. Black men are like all other men. We are human beings living here, thriving, and breathing, wanting to assert ourselves and live a good life and struggling to understand life and to be a part of the world in which we've never been given a chance.

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** Good, because you hear so much on TV about black people killing each other. That's a shame, man. You know, so white people, they be doing stupid stuff like Jeffrey Dahmer killing and eating them or whatever. Black people just kill them. They don't think nothing about it. White people do that crazy stuff, tie them up, torture them, rape them, then kill them.

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** And then they scared of us? And they do that eating people stuff.

## THE COOL POSE

**BYRON HURT:** I think that the idea of ice came from the long tradition of being cool for black males. Being cool under pressure, enduring the elements of slavery, their

oppression and rejection. So you have to handle that somehow, and the way I guess most men handle it so that they weren't completely emasculated was by being cool.

**MARLENE CONNOR:** When people talk about cool, they immediately start talking about the look. The clothes, how you wear your hat, the cigarette, whether you have one or not, where is it? Or you know an earring? These are all symbols. And it says something about what you've achieved or how tough you are or how hip you are, how much you know about what's going on, how down you are, how much money you have. It is completely a lifestyle.

**BYRON HURT:** And I guess some people might not understand why it is so important to be cool for black men. But I know that when I was young, it was extremely important to be cool. To walk cool, to talk cool, to be cool, to be perceived as cool. Nobody wants to be perceived as corny. Nobody wants to be perceived as being nerdy because that meant you were less than a man.

**MARLENE CONNOR:** It's a defining mechanism for each other. It's a force that black boys have created to bring them to manhood.

**BYRON HURT:** And I think the theme of being cool, right from cool itself to chill. You know, you have people like Chilly T. I used to call myself Chilly B back in high school or junior high school. It sounds stupid now, but now today you have Ice Cube and Ice T. It went from one extreme to the next. And I think that has to do with black masculinity. The epitome of coolness: ice.

**ANTHONY WILLIAMS:** It's like this, man. My mother, you know what I'm saying, any person's mother, they never really know the things you got to go through. They only know that young man when he's in the house. When my friends ever came around my mother, you know what I'm saying? No cursing, hats off, take out your gold teeth. Chill, relax all that. Know what I'm saying? I'm saying, you in front of Miss Williams. You know, in front of Miss so and so. It was all about respect for elders. And that's how my family viewed it. So when you say, how important is it to be cool? Understand that once you leave that house, that nest, once you leave that security, you on the streets. You'll have to hand yours on the streets.

**MARQUIS:** It's a shame that you got to put on some funny old role like you just Billy Badass or somebody, but if you don't you're gonna be very disrespected.

**ANTHONY WILLIAMS:** Ain't no need living in the community if you ain't got no respect, if your peers don't respect you, you just need to leave. Move out.

**MARQUIS:** Because all black man life he's been disrespected, made to do this or forced to do this or forced to do that.

**MARLENE CONNOR:** That's why the black man demands respect. And that's what every boy wants. He wants to become a man that everybody respects and will give the

nod to. And basically when you give the nod and you say he's cool, you're basically saying to the other person, no need to challenge him. No need to check him out. We've done that work for you, and he's okay. So you can walk through your day, through your week, through your neighborhood or whatever, safe for that moment. And that's really what it's designed to do.

**BYRON HURT:** You think a lot of brothers out there trying to be cool?

**TONY BELL:** Oh yeah. Most def, most def. I bet a lot of them that's out there that's carrying guns out there is the one's just trying to be cool. Not all of them, but a lot of them, you know what I'm saying. Most of the time, when those ones pull out, they won't even pull the trigger. It shows that they just trying to be cool. Straight up.

**MARLENE CONNOR:** True cool comes from true accomplishment in terms of really testing yourself out there on the street. It doesn't come from what you just put on. And that's why a lot of white guys trying to be cool, quote unquote, come across as silly because these outfits that black guys wear are not arbitrary. They have meaning. And so when other people put them on, they have no meaning. Black men feel very powerful through cool, through being cool, and through all the efforts they make to become cool. And so they don't necessarily see the white man as more powerful than them because cool is very powerful. It's about being a man.

**ANTHONY WILLIAMS:** If the world want to call it being cool, call it being cool. But if you want to call it being cool, you gotta see how important it is to have your respect on the streets.

**MARLENE CONNOR:** And now they've gained the respect of their community, and they just want to go out and make money and perhaps get a house in the suburbs like everyone else. The rest of the community of America doesn't recognize that manhood.

## EMOTIONS

**HARRY LIGHTFOOT:** It's like, you know, people have always told me that. When I was a kid, my pops used to say, you got to work 110%, you know, to be better and to get that position that the white man would get.

**BYRON HURT:** Do you tell your son he has to work twice as hard? Have you ever told him that?

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** Yeah. Did your dad ever tell you that?

**BYRON HURT:** Yeah. My dad, my mother, my father, my grandmother, my grandfather.

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** And what did you think about it?

**BYRON HURT:** What did I think about it? Well to be honest with you, at first I didn't believe it. Initially I didn't believe it until I started to see it actually happening and why they told me that. It scared me. It scared me that they told me that.

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** What about the resentment? You resent even the thought that you would have to?

**BYRON HURT:** Of course I did. I still do. I don't understand it. That's one of the reasons why I'm making this film. Why do we have to work twice as hard, and not only that but like what are the effects of us having to work twice as hard?

**KENYATTA COLON:** It's like no matter what I do, no matter what accomplishments I achieve, no matter how many degrees or whatever I get, I will always be a black male in America.

**BELL HOOKS:** I feel sometimes that black men collectively have had this sort of anguish put on them. It's like telling somebody you should do something in order to have selfhood and identity even though the culture has closed that door to you. So, what is that about other than creating frustration, hostility, confusion, a sense of I'm a failure but I don't know why I'm a failure.

**RICHARD MAJORS Ph. D.:** We overmedicate ourselves with drugs and alcohol oftentimes when we're hurting due to the stress. We have more hypertension than anyone because we won't talk about our problems. We won't seek medical attention, and we won't disclose our feelings when we're feeling upset.

**ROLAND GILBERT:** Particularly in the African-American family, we have something called the no talk rule. And children are taught very early, whatever is going on in this house, you don't mention it to nobody else. You don't talk about your pain, your sadness, your anger, your fear, your guilt, your shame. When you get outside this house, whatever is going on, you say fine. How you doing? Fine. So we learn very early not to talk about our feelings, particularly the male child, because the male child is supposed to be tough.

**MUNTU MBONISI:** A brother can oftentimes be hurt, but because hurt isn't something we identify with, he'll think he's a man. Or he can be sad. Or feel guilty and then express that as anger. So they get kind of mixed up. Nobody's there to help validate it, to help the children or the youth or the young brothers work that out. To work it out in a way where they can still feel like they're a person and that they're a man in that process.

**MONIFA AKINWOLE:** If you can't express something, it doesn't just disappear, and you can't just keep it inside. You have to release it in one way, shape, or form. And men are very external with their emotions. It's not that men don't emote. I really hate when people say that. Women tend to more internalize things. Men tend to more externalize things.

**MICHAEL ERIC DYSON:** To be caring, to be sensitive, to be warm, to be embracing is often read as weakness in this larger society in which we live, especially in many of the so-called ghetto communities and working class communities in which so many black men are nurtured. So that to embrace one's softer side, to embrace one's caring and feeling and sensitive nature is somehow to surrender, to abdicate, the prerogative of being a real black strong man.

**KEVIN POWELL:** Let's admit that a lot of it goes back to how we were socialized as boys, you know. The whole physical thing. Boys who show their feelings are weak. They're less than boys. They're punks. They're suckers. They're quote unquote faggots or homosexual, which is ridiculous.

**DAVID LEWIS:** I feel like the truth, the underlying feelings that goes on in a man, if we manifest that and bring that to the forefront, we will have the definition of true masculinity.

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** I speak the truth loud and clear, but not heard.

**UNKNOWN BLACK MALE:** Be aware white man. Was having eyes the ultimate paradox?

**JOHN HENRICK CLARKE:** Those who say that we are lacking in manhood must ask the question, if I was in their position could I have possibly done with all the odds against me as were against them, could I have possibly survived and done what they did? If that was put forth, then the idea is not to question black masculinity. The real question then is white masculinity.

## BLACK MALE HOMOSEXUALITY

**ROOSEVELT MOSBY:** I think that we don't know what a man is. The larger discussion is we've never had that discussion. Many of us in the room, we say (mumbles). But many of us in the room look at each other and say, you know, that ain't no man. We have that discussion all the time. And so me as my black brothers who are heterosexual, they don't know what a man is. And so if we are going to have a discussion, we need to say, "Well honey, this is what I think a man is, and this is what..." and barter --. But I think manhood is a spectrum.

**KPHRA ANKH AMN:** Homosexuality is foreign to create. That is not our masculinity. It has not existed. There weren't even words in our dialect for which you just called homosexuality. Our masculinity didn't create homosexuality. Our masculinity created us the voice to say that the black man is god, and the black woman is a goddess. So masculinity has nothing to do with homosexuality.

**KEITH BOYKIN:** There is a fear out there that by supporting black gay men other people might think that I'm gay too. It creates a divide between heterosexual and homosexual and bisexual.

**KEITH:** Just like anybody, you had to deal with a human being as an individual. You cannot meet anybody and try to group them into some category and think you understand them or know them. You have to deal with them as an individual. So if you meet a gay man, you got to deal with him as the man that he is and not some perception you have of the group that he belongs to.

**SALAH BROWN:** For me, I don't know how I feel about homosexuality completely yet. So I usually, like try sort of not to speak about it. Because I don't know, you know what I'm saying? When you run into cliquy circle of all these conscious politically correct people, you can't come out and say, I am a little bit homophobic. I really don't know how to relate to homosexuals.

**JACQUES:** Especially, I guess, in a special sense knowing that the whole homosexual is kind of stereotyped as the weak, limp-wrist faggot, sissy, a guy who wants to be a woman. Knowing that that's not what I want to be, and that's not who I am.

**KEITH:** In fact, if you went to a nightclub or a bar where black gay men frequent, you'll probably find hundreds of black gay men who look just like your next-door neighbors. The men at the gym, the men on the police force, the men in the military. All of whom you never suspect they were gay unless you saw them doing something that proved that they were gay or showed that they were gay.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** This is a man.

**KEITH:** I have a whole problem with what it means to be masculine. What is masculinity? Is that having bulging muscles? What does that mean? Does that mean being able to kick somebody's ass? What do you mean by being masculine?

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** Masculinity. We got a demonstration. They're gonna do the manhood.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** When brothers started hugging each other, it wasn't in a hello brother, how are you? It was in a what's up! What's up, kid?

**SALAH BROWN:** You had to like show everybody else that you weren't like gay or anything like that.

**BYRON HURT:** At any point of your acknowledgment of your sexual orientation, have you felt less than a man?

**KEITH BOYKIN:** I don't think that you define your manhood by whether you have sex with a woman. I don't think you define your manhood by how many children you have. I think you define your manhood by how you mistreat women. I think you define your manhood by your behavior, not just your sexual behavior. Your personal honesty, your values, and your integrity, that's what defines your manhood. Your sense of

responsibility. Your willingness to do something for your community. That's more important to your manhood than who you choose to love.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** For the black male, life is a gamble. Sometimes you win, most of the time you lose. I think most of the time you lose in this society as a black man when you're gambling because the society is not for you. It's against you. I lost.

## **BLACK MALES: VIOLENCE AND FEARS**

**SIMBA PROJECT WORKER:** We deal with how the person is doing. Now, Milford said he had a fight. Gordon, listen up. So, Milford had a fight. So what happened, Milford?

**MILFORD:** Something happened, and he said he was gonna shoot me.

**SIMBA PROJECT WORKER:** The racism of the society has created a situation in which we are wielding the weapons of our own self-destruction.

**HAMMER:** We have been tricked into believing that killing the next man to handle our problem is masculine or makes us down.

**BENNIE MOATES:** We hurting each other killing one another. Hurting one another.

**BYRON HURT:** You know what? It's mostly black men doing it to black men.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** We more destructive to ourselves than the white man is. It ain't the white man, white man. We doing our own club. We doing what the Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow and all of that put together couldn't do. We just taking each other out.

**BYRON HURT:** But why?

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** Why?

**HAMMER:** Sometimes our masculinity can also be aligned with pride, okay? And that's when you get into the violent thing, right? It's like, okay now we have a problem. Now you dissed me. So does my masculinity rise up, i.e. my pride rise up, i.e. I got to handle this.

**SIMBA PROJECT WORKER:** So he said he was gonna shoot you?

**MILFORD:** He crazy though. He said, his exact words. "If I go to jail, I'm gonna kill you." I say, "What's your problem talking to me like you going to kill me? If you kill me, I'll kill your whole family."

**RICHARD MAJORS, Ph. D:** That's the negative part of masculinity. Because even though we have to be brave, we have to be tough, sometimes, as Freud would say is that we become obsessed with a defense we can't switch it off. It almost works too well.

**TREVOR MONTGOMERY:** If we're going down there, if there's ten feet away there's like maybe a group of five black guys. They could be five scholars. They could be five kids from Princeton or something, but automatically, boom, my hard hat is on. And I'm walking with that bop, and I'm walking mean. And one of them could say, "What's up? How you doing?" And I could misinterpret that for, "Yo, who are you? What are you doing?" And just turn around and just flip and then bow. Right there, there's an altercation right there. Because I wore my hard hat, and I wore it the wrong way.

**KYLE EDMONDS:** Little things like walking down the street, you know. We've been so socialized, so indoctrinated against ourselves, the black male. On TV everything negative, news, the whole nine. We've become afraid of ourself.

**BENNIE MOATES:** Everyday I go to work. I go to work at like 5:30. I'm driving. I'm scared, man. I could be at this stop light, red light, they could just come up and say, "you know what time it is."

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** And the thing is, we ain't in no gang or nothing, know what I'm saying? We travel by ourself. I'm by myself just about all the time. So you ain't gonna catch me with no gang or no crew or nothing like that. So if somebody wanted to get me, or they don't like me, it could happen.

**TREVOR MONTGOMERY:** There's nothing wrong with wearing your hard hat because you never know what could happen. If you're on the street by yourself, nobody got your back. You got to watch your front, and you got to watch your back. Because you understand you can be taken out at anytime. You living in Boston, me living in New York. At any time we could just be ran up on and taken out. So, I think you should wear your hard hat at all times. But don't wear it the wrong way, you know what I'm saying. Just wear it for protection.

**HAMMER:** Any two men are capable of bringing the same amount of harm to each other. Because in the end, there is only a certain amount that each one of us can take and then we die. So either one of us, we both are equally capable of ending each other's life. So before we even get anywhere near that, I teach the young men just to walk away. Walk away, but it don't mean you walk away with your back turned. Look over your shoulder but walk away.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK BOY:** You could have walked away.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK BOY:** He could have ran up --.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK BOY:** You had your choice.

**SIMBA PROJECT WORKER:** What are you gonna do next time if this happens? You know what time it is.

**MILFORD:** There ain't no guarantee I believed it.

**SIMBA PROJECT WORKER:** Okay, you gonna make some choices, right? So you know what you can do? You don't have to become a victim to nobody else, brother.

**MILFORD:** I know all that, man.

**SIMBA PROJECT WORKER:** Well, you know it, but are you applying it?

**MILFORD:** What?

**SIMBA PROJECT WORKER:** You know it, but are you applying it?

## **SEXISM: MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**KYLE EDMONDS:** Can I get in on here?

**BYRON HURT:** Yeah, man.

**KYLE EDMONDS:** All right, a friend of mine, he once told me he was asked, how come black men always holding their penis? You know, you see young brothers doing that all the time, holding their penis. And he said to the young lady he was speaking to, the reason that they hold their penis is because they've been stripped of everything else that they can identify with as being a man. Their education, their self worth, their dignity, their morality, their religion. Everything has been stripped of them. The only thing that they have left to remind them that they're men is their penis. So they hold onto it.

**KWAME NDZIBAH:** Sexism helps us be men. Because what it in fact does is it justifies and it supports all the whacked out thinking that men have.

**ALLAH ADAMS:** You can't let no women run over you. They will if you give them the opportunity. They'll run all over you.

**BYRON HURT:** Why can't you let a woman run over you?

**ALLAH ADAMS:** Because, you know what I'm saying? It's not made to be like that. You are supposed to be the backbone, know what I'm saying. You ain't supposed to be weak, know what I'm saying. Can't let her get the strength, know what I'm saying?

**KWAME NDZIBAH:** Because we already know that there's a packing order because we kind of feel and we kind of see everyday that there's someone above us. So we have to

maintain that packing order by stepping on someone else's neck when someone's stepping on ours.

**RAS BARAKA:** It's just like a slave master hits a slave for being impudent. If you say something, you got a nerve, what are you talking about? You don't have no right, like they told Dred Scot. You have no right that we bow to respect. You have nothing to say to me. How can you say that to me? You ought to be beat.

**SHEDRICK HURT:** I would hit her everyday. Every chance that I got, I eat breakfast. I get to eat breakfast. Bam! Lunch. Bam! Dinner. Bam! Any opportunity I had I would do it.

**BYRON HURT:** Why?

**SHEDRICK HURT:** Because I felt that it was right.

**KEVIN POWELL:** A couple of years ago when I wrote this article, *Essence*, about striking this sister, something that I admitted in a magazine. A lot of brothers said that I was insane for writing it. And I felt kind of stupid at first. I said, "why am I doing this?" But then I said to myself, I wish that there was a brother who would pull me aside when I was younger and said, you can't express your anger, your frustration, or take that stuff out on black women. They're not your enemy.

**P.L.A.Y. CAMP TEACHER:** Is there ever a situation where it's justified for a man to hit a woman?

**STUDENTS:** No.

**STUDENT #1:** Yes, I think so.

**STUDENT #2:** If they hit you, you can back off. But if they hit you a few times, you might have to push her away or something like that to get her off you.

**STUDENT #3:** I feel if a woman hit a man, a man is strong enough to take that hit. She's not gonna hurt you. But if you hit her, you're gonna hurt her and then get in trouble for that. So why go through all that even though she hit you first, but you gonna hit her back and get in trouble over it? You know, she called the cops or something and you got to go through a lot. So I feel no means necessary should a man hit a female.

**P.L.A.Y. CAMP TEACHER:** Does everybody have a playbook? Does everyone have one of these?

**P.L.A.Y. CAMP TEACHER:** My experience with black men is that they have never had anyone to dialogue about this issue with them before. Usually the first thing that happens is that they don't accept their part in this whole men's violence against women issue.

**P.L.A.Y. CAMP TEACHER:** Why you think guys hit women?

**STUDENT #4:** Childhood experiences.

**MALIK SINGLETON:** One of the main insults a boy can give another boy is, you are a girl, you know. That's deep. "Fight! Fight!" after that.

**MONIFA AKINWOLE:** So already women have like a negative connotation associated with them, and all the terms that you pick up from calling somebody a pussy and all this other stuff is because that's supposed to be everything that is weak and negative. And being male is everything that is strong and positive.

**UNIDENTIFIED: BLACK MALE:** Regardless of how good a man I am or nice I am or how well I treat women as an individual, the fact is that as a man that I've been raised in many ways to see women as less than.

**MARQUIS:** Me personally, I'm gonna treat a bitch like a bitch and a woman like a woman. You see what I'm saying? If you're a woman I will never disrespect you. I will never call you a bitch, a ho. Watch out, brother. I'll never disrespect a black woman if she respects herself.

**STUDENT #5:** I was sitting on my porch one day, and this man and this lady was walking down the street. I guess he was arguing with her, and he just hit her. And she ain't do nothing. They kept walking, and he hit her again.

**P.L.A.Y. CAMP TEACHER:** And that was out in public. They were walking down the street. So if you think this guy is hitting this woman, walking down the street in public, what do you think about the possibilities of him hitting her in private?

**STUDENT #6:** Might be worse.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** We see them as bitches and whores and so on, and not as our mothers and our sisters and our kin and people that we care about and love, and I think that that's what sexism does. It sets women up as other.

**CORLISS HILL:** This happens all the time. You know, if you're walking down the street, and a brother calls out to you or something. And you say hello, but you don't give him the response that he wants. And he calls you all types of names. He calls you a bitch, calls you whatever. And it's not about that. Maybe I have something to do. I acknowledged you. I said hello. I smiled, and I'm doing my thing now. But you don't have to call me names because I didn't come over so you could kick it to me.

**MONIFA AKINWOLE:** This is the 90's. I don't think that we should continuously just coddle sexist behaviors and practices.

**ANDREW YOUNG:** Manhood comes from within, and when you're a man, you don't need to show it off. You don't need to prove it. You sure don't need to humiliate anybody. Men build up the people around them. Men particularly build up their women. And whenever I see a man who's beating on a woman, I know that that's somebody that's not sure of his manhood.

**BELL HOOKS:** And all of this is killing us as a people. We know it. Your self-proclaimed sexist is probably just a child who was wounded in some way that he has not reconciled, you know. And until we start putting our wounded-ness on the political agenda, dealing with it in a mental health context that is politicized, we will never be free. White people will continue to rule us and to determine our lives.

**JOHN HENRICK CLARKE:** You have to remember that slavery, the concept, started in the mind of the European. And that one way or the other over the method of slavery changed. Slavery has not changed inside of the mind of the European. The idea of domination, and they understand if you're going to dominate a people, you got to dominate the breadwinner. You must restrict the breadwinner. You must restrict the planter of the seed.

## FATHERS

**MARQUIS HARPER:** I'm ready to be a father. I'm ready to be a father. And as far as my reactions throughout the day is, I guess in anticipation because I know that her labor's being induced today, and I know that there's a great possibility that he'll be here today. So, I mean, I'm kind of anxious, but I don't really get too excited until I can touch him or I can feel him.

**JACKIE HURT:** The privilege of being a father is, to me, was the highest aspiration I had in my whole entire life. And I don't know, the sense of pride in seeing your own children born and the sense of, I guess the compelling drive to be a protector and a father, a provider, always has given me the most sense of motivation of any other goal in life.

**MRS. McCLOUD:** I think given the scraps they had to deal with a lot of times, I think they are given a bad wrap. I think most black men love their children and want to be there for their children. A lot of exterior things happen to prevent them from being there when they want to be.

**DMC:** The main problem that we got going on in the black community is the fathers. The kids do not have a father to look at. You got the mother struggling to raise all the children.

**ANTHONY WILLIAMS:** I was the youngest in the family. Two black women raising me with no man in the house. The things they had to go through. My mother struggling. Me and my mother never had no time to chill. We never could go to parks, you know what

I'm saying. From the time I can ever remember she'd been working. From the time I was born, she was working. I call her now. She work on Saturdays, sometimes Sundays. Put in her time. You know? I can't call her. I was there, know what I'm saying? If you didn't do the dirt, if you didn't do the work, you don't even count in my book.

**DAVID LEWIS:** A lot of people probably might be looking at this if this was put in the documentary of this kid to say, is this your son? Or whatever, or kin? This is extended family. He is a black male child. I don't know who his biological father is, but today for right now he can lay his head on my shoulder and cry. I can't respect no man who can't do four things.

**ANTHONY WILLIAMS:** I can't respect no man who can't give love to his son, another young black man coming up. It's a part of you. This is you, another black man. He about to go through the same things you went through.

**ANDREW JONES:** At the same time, you a product of a circle of abuse that denied you a father in a home, that denied your father a father in the home, and denied you the kind of preparation and training you need to be to be a psychological, emotional provider in the home. And let's just face it, an effective provider outside the home too.

**ERIC MITCHELL:** We do have to recognize that if a person, if the fathers make a conscious choice to change their behavior and try to make amends for it, then we have to try and allow them the opportunity.

**ANDREW JONES:** Here's what I really think about this society. I think this society plays a trick on single black fathers. In a myriad of ways that nobody argues about, it denies us personal, social, and financial resources. But on the other side of the scale it also enforces a tremendous set of responsibilities and holds us accountable for those responsibilities and says that you get little reward on one side and maximum retribution on the other. And if you don't pay your child support and if you don't uphold your responsibilities, you're gonna go to jail. But at the same time, you can't get a job.

**ERIC MITCHELL:** The responsibility of a parent is beyond finances. You're a parent, biologically not financially, and any constraints that are imposed outside of that, you have to fight against them, if you are committed to it.

**ANDREW JONES:** I want to be a father. I want to be a good father. But I want to be a man and a father. And being a man for me is having my full rights as well as my responsibilities to this society, and I intend to enforce that. I intend to continue to be a man and be a father, the best man and the best father I can be, and I'm sure a lot of brothers out there know exactly what I am talking about.

**REVEREND FLYNN JOHNSON:** If we could get men to commit as husbands and fathers, we could see a radical change in the life of our families and our communities. Just because Dad is there. I say there, I mean he's giving mental, spiritual, physical direction, emotional direction, to the life of that family.

**HERB BOYD:** Being without a father, I was in a position to kind of create my father. I could go out in the community, and I could make my father be a number of black men. So obviously, if you're given that kind of option, you'll only take the best. So in one way, I think I was a little bit more blessed than those who had a father. They had to endure that person for all of their flaws and warts and weaknesses of that individual.

**BELL HOOKS:** Let's say a lot of black boys who are men now, but who never knew a father, they can fantasize about how their lives would have been different if there had been a father in the home. But I know that my father really was unkind to my brother, that he coerced him, he beat him, he was not loving to him. And the fact that my brother grew up with a father in the home did not mean that he grew up a healthy black man.

**REVEREND FLYNN JOHNSON:** We must present men who do what they say. The credibility gap probably is one of the biggest problems. The key issue is modeling. If a man will do what he says and a child sees that, there's a pretty good chance that child will become like his father.

**JACKIE HURT:** If there is ever a search to understand, to know, a reason to get up in the morning, to have a reason to get up out of bed and put your clothes on and go out and apply yourself, being a father is a big part of that.

**DAVID LEWIS:** Say, I ain't going to prison. Say it. Say, I ain't going.

**LITTLE BOY:** I ain't going.

**DAVID LEWIS:** Yeah, this is our future right here.

## THE FUTURE

**BYRON HURT:** So, what does the future hold for black men? Some argue that black men are endangered, a rare breed, a species fighting to survive.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** The number one cause of death among young black males is now AIDS. Homicide is second. Accidents is third. And tragically, suicide is fourth.

**BYRON HURT:** Others say black men have survived insurmountable odds and will continue to thrive well into the next century.

**ANDREW YOUNG:** Black men are all right. In order to destroy the black male, you got to destroy the Earth. Because we virtually are indestructible except in so far as we destroy ourselves. We are not going to be destroyed by any outside force. But when we start thinking we're black and that there's something wrong with that, then we're in

trouble. Our strength is in our pride. That's in our heart and mind and spirit. Nobody can take that from you.

**BYRON HURT:** Many black men, like Roland Gilbert in Oakland, California, are creating new models of masculinity.

**SIMBA PROJECT WORKER:** That's how we deal with it like this. Whatever's going on with you affects us.

**ROLAND GILBERT:** We define a man as a man takes responsibility for how he thinks, feels, and acts. So the more you take responsibility for how you think, feel, and act, the more of a man you are.

**BYRON HURT:** His SIMBA project founded in 1988 is designed to help young boys redefine what it is to be a man while training elders to lead by example.

**ROLAND GILBERT:** We got to wake up to the game. Trying to be like them is not what we want to do. We don't want to be like them. We want to be like us, who we really are. Nurturing, protecting, leaders, fathers, providers, saviors.

**BYRON HURT:** You can learn a lot by looking through yourself. You'll see behind an image that was created for us, feelings that are real. One by one, we are different. Together we are the same. The men and women I've met, they all gave me something to grow on, each one of them did.

**HAMMER:** This is the film that was made on black masculinity and Hammer said he was gonna help you with it when it was time, so now it's time and tell them ollie ollie all come free.

**BYRON HURT:** Every black man has something to offer; yet to build up our communities, we cannot isolate our sisters.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** You wake brothers up and show them how much sexism affects men.

**UNIDENTIFIED BLACK MALE:** Because how are we going to hill as a community? How are we going to have a total liberation if one part of the people who are going to contribute to that liberation consider themselves to be oppressed?

**BYRON HURT:** We are all neither brutes nor savages, criminal nor rapists. Instead we are men. Men who love. Men who care. Men who feel pain, and men who cause it. On our good days, we are invincible. Everyday, we are vulnerable. But on our best days, truly our best days, we are both. All of which makes me say, (singing) I'm finding out what life is all about.

[END]