

# the **MASCULINITY** **PROJECT: Black Community in Focus**

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**AFRICAN AMERICAN MASCULINITY SUBJECT OF INNOVATIVE  
MULTIMEDIA AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE**  
*National Black Programming Consortium and Independent Television Service  
To Launch “THE MASCULINITY PROJECT: Black Community in Focus”*

*(San Francisco/New York)* — Today, the **National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC)** and the **Independent Television Service (ITVS)**, announce the launch of **THE MASCULINITY PROJECT: Black Community in Focus**—an interactive multimedia and community engagement project that asks the question “What does it mean to be a man?” Its purpose is to enlist diverse, independent, multigenerational conversations surrounding the African American community. While the main topic is masculinity, there is a focus on the broader issues facing the African American community in the 21st century.

THE MASCULINITY PROJECT has a national community-based reach through a major community engagement initiative in partnership with some of the country’s leading organizations. The project also features an array of interactive content on its online portal that can be found at: **[www.masculinityproject.org](http://www.masculinityproject.org)**.

**The Context**

This year Barack Obama made history when he was elected as president of the United States on November 4, 2008. His candidacy has trained significant public and media attention to issues of race and the challenges facing black men in this country. While President Elect Obama ran for the highest office in the land, he also hails from Illinois, a state where the prison population is 63 percent African American—an incarceration rate nine times that of whites. But what does it all mean?

Although high-profile studies on the challenges facing black males have prompted urgent measures, they have not impacted the images that keep black men and boys limited to one-dimensional caricatures in mainstream media. Neither have they impacted the well-publicized exorbitant rates of incarceration, unemployment and high school dropouts among black males. Missing in most responses to the “crises” facing this community is the availability venues for black men to engage the stereotypes and challenge the trends that have defined this generation.

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THE MASCULINITY PROJECT showcases a dynamic online mix of new and re-released works from emerging and veteran filmmakers and media makers, as well as community-generated media and youth created content—focusing on four key themes: **Family, Culture, Community and Justice**. Web-friendly media ranges from topics of great urgency, such as those that delve into the criminal justice system and into poverty issues, to those of historical significance, such as the legacy of civil rights.

THE MASCULINITY PROJECT addresses the critical topic of masculinity by exploring how black men are represented and perceived. The Project investigates the obstacles they encounter and celebrates the contributions they make, connecting those experiences, obstacles and contributions to larger issues facing society, such as education, health care and public policy. Together, the media clips, online forum and educational toolkit will help communities to reflect, discuss and take action on the factors that impact the lives of black males and, in addition, encourage a new generation of filmmakers and storytellers.

### **Project Features**

The home of THE MASCULINITY PROJECT — the website **[www.masculinityproject.org](http://www.masculinityproject.org)** — features video shorts, online forums and an educational toolkit. The media content calls forth well-known black figures that range from James Baldwin to Curtis “50 cent” Jackson to Barack Obama, as well as ordinary families dealing with fatherhood, illness, homelessness and economic justice, among many other issues. Users of the website are able to interact and chat with each other, read compelling articles and blogs, and reflect and take action on various items relating to the lives of black males. Site users will also be able to upload their own audio and video content, export the project’s media content to their own websites and blogs, and even create new media using a library of images and audio.

“We hope to encourage a new generation of storytellers and filmmakers,” said **Jacquie Jones**, executive director, NBPC. “We expect the project to spark a cross-cultural dialogue that reaches our neighborhoods as well as our policymakers. We believe that this dynamic, historic moment and all its competing elements make this an increasingly urgent issue that must be addressed by understanding the context and the histories that surround it.”

**Sally Jo Fifer**, ITVS president and CEO, is equally excited: “Since ITVS’s inception nearly 20 years ago, we have championed diversity in public media—connecting diverse producers, diverse content and diverse audience members in every part of the country. THE MASCULINITY PROJECT is a vital and innovative step in our organization-wide strategy to attract more producers of color and to support them in sharing their stories with their fellow Americans in new ways.”

### **Community Engagement Component**

In addition to the interactive online portal, a national community engagement campaign plays a major role in the success of the initiative. To help develop and disseminate the media content, the project has enlisted community partners from nonprofit and public policy organizations working in the areas of race, gender, public health, youth development, media production, journalism and economic justice.

Campaign partners include: A Call to Men; Boys and Girls Clubs of America; Gender PAC; Youth Movement Records; Center for Family Policy and Practice/University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Center for Study of Race, Politics and Culture—University of Chicago; Listen Up!; National Association of Black Journalists; Society of African American Professionals; The New York Life/Schomburg Center Junior Scholars Program; The Twenty-First Century Foundation; and the Young People’s Project.

Working with these partners, THE MASCULINITY PROJECT develops a free educational toolkit for community groups that will include a facilitator guide, educational lesson plans, background information, and national partner resources. Parents, educators, artists and professionals can use the media and toolkit to engage youth in discussions about gender, race, culture, sexuality and justice. To support media literacy, facilitators can encourage young men to reflect on the impact of a narrow definition of masculinity on themselves, their relationships and their communities. Youth-serving organizations, journalists and media makers can use the content to emphasize the positive, creative contributions of young black men, and give them the tools to create new images of manhood that affirm rather than deny their humanity.

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**The Masculinity Project: Black Community in Focus** is a joint partnership of the National Black Programming Consortium (nbpc.tv), the leading provider of African American content to public television, and the Independent Television Service (itvs.org), the nation's foremost supporters of independent media within the PBS system and beyond, with support from the Ford Foundation (fordfound.org).



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