Raising Boys: The Process, the Struggle, the Documentary
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Honors Thesis
Fall 2005

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For young men, particularly young black men in today’s American society, the path towards adulthood is paved with an entirely new set of challenges to overcome. At a time when many of their peers are dead or in jail before their 25\textsuperscript{th} birthday, young black men face a constant struggle to find a balance in life. On the streets of the San Francisco Bay Area, (a grouping of cities in the northern region of California, including San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley), more of these young men are being labeled by members of their communities as “menaces to society” than are graduating from high school. Something must have gone wrong. The inquiring minds of the American public are curious to know where the parents are in these situations and how much of the problem, if any, is their fault. Speaking only from the viewpoint of a spectator (and as someone’s child), it seems natural to assume parenting to be one of the most trying of all possible occupations. It requires patience, compromise and incredible sacrifice on the parts of the men and women who choose to take part in it. At the same time, I have been told that being a parent can be a truly rewarding, and fulfilling experience. Despite the trials of parenthood, those who accept its challenge embark on a vigorous journey to contribute to shaping the lives of future generations. But still, it is appropriate to wonder how this sudden downward spiral of negativity for today’s African-American youth has affected these parents. Where do they place the blame? Who should it fall to? In light of such inquiries I have proposed the idea of producing a documentary film about the process of raising boys examining all-inclusive elements, and also the experiences that
the boys themselves must go through. Based in my hometown in the Bay Area, the film will explore “raising boys” as a process in general, but will concentrate on black boys in the area specifically. In this paper, I will discuss this process and accompanying struggles while examining historical events that may have influenced recent incidents. Last but certainly not least, I will discuss the idea for and behind the documentary film that I have proposed.

The Process

I was raised in a single parent home (my parents divorced when I was four years old). My mother worked full-time, went to school part-time at a local community college, and afterwards came home and took care of my little sister and me. I realized early the difficulties involved with parenting. Yet and still, I often asked my mother for a little brother. Like many small children, the conceptual complexities of child rearing were lost on me. She used to say things like, “Boys are too much trouble” or “I always wanted to have two girls, and that’s all.”

When I was younger the closest thing that I had to a brother was my cousin Jason; he is a year older than me. At one point during my early childhood years, my parents and I shared an apartment with a small portion of my extended immediate family: my grandmother, aunt, uncle, and my cousin. Because of this, we functioned under somewhat of an intermingled parental structure. My mother had a part in his upbringing as well. And whenever she would say that boys were too much trouble, I would remind her of that. Little did any of us know that his days of getting into trouble had yet to come.
In addition to raising her own children, my mother has worked in child
development for over twenty years; first as a teacher and guidance counselor, now as
director at KinderCare Learning Center, a national childcare company. Through this work
she is able to assist in the development of the lives of many children, both girls and boys.
And the parents of those children are always grateful to her. Few understand the general
importance of teachers, counselors and mentors in the life of a child better than the
parents. These people can provide alternatives for communication in dealing with
sensitive or embarrassing issues; things children are uncomfortable sharing with parents.
Many times these issues involve teenage questions and concerns about sex, drugs, and
other things of that nature. Teachers, mentors, counselors, etc. can all be effective in
influencing safe, constructive behavior.

Another benefit of teachers especially is that they are the ones that spend the most
interactive time with the children during the day. Schools are the breeding grounds on
which peer pressure thrives. Teachers and counselors may notice trouble that parents
could possibly overlook, such as problems with friends, relationships, or self-esteem
issues. With the workplace continuously expanding and role of the stay-at-home parent
becoming virtually non-existent (seventy-eight percent of mothers of six to thirteen year
old children work full-time jobs\(^1\)), these people’s roles are more important now than ever
before.

At the risk of sounding cliche, a timeless expression comes to mind: “It takes a
village to raise a child.” I would speculate that this particular aphorism becomes truer
with every passing generation, and therefore in that regard has endured. I would even go
a step further in saying that it is truer now than before. Children have gradually become
more independent, with more decisions to make on their own. The cost of full-time childcare can often be equivalent to tuition at a public university; most of the families in desperate need of these services cannot afford them, earning less than $25,000 per year. Because of this, more than fifteen million children are left unsupervised between the hours of 3-8pm. (National Center for Community Education) The need for supplemental leadership is evident in these statistics. I do not believe that any parent, no matter how experienced, can completely raise any child on his or her own.

In an interview in the October 1996 issue of M.E.N. Magazine, educator and author Michael Gurian referred to what he termed a “tribal” or three-family system. Gurian has written four books addressing the issues and parental concerns that accompany the process of raising boys: The Wonder of Boys, Boys and Girls Learn Differently, The Good Son, and A Fine Young Man. In his proposed system, the key to effectively raising boys is a strong first family, or the nuclear family. This is not necessarily the traditional two-parent home; in fact, it may consist of only one parent or a same-sex couple as heads of the household. The second family would be any daycare centers and after school programs, also any other close family members and friends who are actively involved in the child’s life such as godparents. Almost ninety percent of children with full-time working parents, and seventy-five percent of those whose parents work part-time, receive regular care from daycare or early education facilities. Having worked in childcare for the past few years, I know that a substantial amount of these children’s formative days are spent with childcare providers. Many children spend between eight and ten hours per weekday in these centers. And lastly, there is the third family which includes the educational system (teachers), community organizations, and
peer groups. As teenagers this group becomes extremely important and influential since many teens feel that their parents will not understand. It is interesting how we forget that our parents spent some years being teenagers as well.

The media has also become more influential, easing its way into the third family. Whether or not parents are willing to accept this growing trend, children form personal bonds and interact (figuratively) with the people they see in the media. It would be naïve to ignore the fact social influences, largely those presented in the media, tend to play a significant role in their decision-making. "Parental guidance" has somehow been transformed into a cliché itself, generically sprinkled on manufactured warning labels for explicit music lyrics and movies. Parents should make sure to involve themselves in what their children take away from the media and also be there to help them interpret things that are unclear.

The Village

The Bay Area has done a fairly credible job of accepting responsibility for its youth culture. There are numerous programs targeted at helping young people become productive even before the onset of troubled behavior, particularly those in the Black and Latino communities. The City of Berkeley Parks and Recreation Department has been home to the development of several such programs since the early 1970s. Organizations like the community based Young Adult Project (Y.A.P) \(^5\) and Berkeley Youth Alternatives (B.Y.A.) \(^6\) provide social and educational opportunities by creating a healthy and safe environment for the youth of the area. In addition to providing structured recreational activities, these programs also offer alternatives for those seeking after school or part-time employment that may have trouble finding it elsewhere. This includes
young people with limited or no work experience and also those who may have previously been in legal trouble. A group of my friends and I were employed at B.Y.A. throughout high school. After only three months I was promoted to Business Manager for BYA Bouquets, the company’s youth operated floral delivery service. The experience that I received there at only sixteen years old has been extremely beneficial for me as an adult. Although I was an “upstanding” youth with good grades and no police record, the same opportunities offered to me were accessible to my peers, even those considered to be at-risk and troublesome. The Parks and Recreation Department for the city of Oakland includes similar programs at local parks. Also, facilities such as the East Oakland Youth Development Center (EOYDC) frequently have local celebrities, like Mark Curry (of *Hanging with Mr. Cooper* fame), in attendance for their community events.

Across the bridge in San Francisco, there are many more constructive youth initiatives taking place. The city of San Francisco the number of violent homicides has dramatically increased in the past few years. The death toll for homicides has already reached eighty-four so far this year. Gang violence has accounted for thirty of the deaths. According to San Francisco police; many of these gang-related killings involve “predominantly black men in the city’s southeastern neighborhoods.” This past summer as part of my internship, I had an opportunity to work with Ms. Pamela Giddes, one of the founding members of the San Francisco Peacemakers. Through a program called “Operation Save a Life,” a group of men and women, and some parents, go out into some of the rougher, gang ridden neighborhoods of San Francisco to minister to the youth once a week. The primary focus of the group is young men, the boys who are on the streets killing one another in random, senseless acts of violence. The program also hosts a
monthly barbeque/community gathering to give the members and the young people a chance to talk and learn about one another. My father is an active member of the SF Peacemakers. The work they do and the support that they provide for the community is immeasurable. Functioning through volunteer work and united members of their community, the SF Peacemakers are committed to educating the youth and implanting alternative ways of thinking because “violence is a health issue” (a popular quote of the organization) for many of those living in and around it constantly.

Police Activities League (PAL): Off the Streets and On the Court

“Sometimes I dream.... that he is me.... You’ve got to see that’s how I dream to be! ....” Though rarely heard these days, “Be Like Mike” was one of the most popular, most catchy commercial tunes of all time. In fact, the introduction of the “Be Like Mike” commercials by Gatorade in 1991 is considered to be the shining moment in the sports drink’s (then) twenty-six year history. The song, referring to NBA All-Star and basketball legend Michael Jordan, reiterated the statistically based evidence that millions of children idolized him and several other professional athletes.

Many boys in the Bay Area, especially those in the Black and Latino communities, fantasize about becoming rich and famous athletes like Michael Jordan. Developing skills in sports occasionally seems the only way out of their low-income, sometimes poverty-stricken lives. When I was younger most of the boys were into sports, mainly football or basketball. Those who opted not to participate in sports found other forms of entertainment, usually involving some range of illegal activity.

The Police Activities League (PAL) took notice of this growing trend, recognizing sports as a means to keep young men out of trouble. The organization was
founded over thirty years ago by a group of police officers under the direction of one San Francisco detective. Its primary objective was to provide a variety of positive, safe activities for youth at the local levels. In 1991 (the same year that the Gatorade commercials aired), the league introduced its first annual basketball tournament. From its success, they were encouraged to sponsor several other types of sporting events, for boys and girls. The events are held all over the state in order to provide the youth an opportunity to experience other environments.¹⁰

The Struggle

While the parents struggle to cope with the changing developmental elements of everyday life for their sons and daughters, it is their children who must deal with them. The stresses of adolescence are magnified due to increasing social pressures and a call to conformity (I will discuss specific trends later in the paper). For young men especially, how they react to these pressures will determine much for their future. With every new generation society seems to place a heavier emphasis on strength and masculinity. (Similar to prominence of issues of body image and sexuality with girls) The rights of passage into manhood are no longer the landmarks of high school graduation and business suits. Those more traditional achievements have been modified to include more violence, less emphasis on education and even less respect for authority figures, sometimes including parents. An increase in gang involvement in the state may have some correlation. Last year in one Bay Area county, the number of known gang members rose sixty-eight percent to 2,500 in a little over a decade.¹¹
It has become increasingly easier for us as a society to disassociate ourselves from tragedies at a distance. The evening news is now the most sinister, depressing and provocative programming on television stations, at both the local and national level. Even now as I am writing, someone’s child is being murdered, and someone else’s child is being sentenced to live a life of deprived of basic freedoms. And yet we are never really affected by any of these things until they affect us, personally. Somewhere along the lines we must realize that believing the children are the future is no longer enough.

**Historical Influence**

Sometimes, though, it is easy to forget the impact of those who came before us. Before we look forward, we must take a look back. History has taught us of the unfair treatment that Blacks received. We have all seen the images of Black men and women being beaten and sprayed with fire hoses and shunned away from restaurant counters. During the Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of some of the most prominent civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr. seemed proof that the non-violent revolution that had promised an easier transition to equality in the late 1950s and early 1960s had all but failed. The San Francisco Bay Area has served as a topic of great political discussion since around this time. But few were events were as controversial as the foundation of the infamous Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland in 1966 by two young black men, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.¹²

The main objective of The Black Panther Party (by the end of the decade, the organization had dropped “Self-Defense” from its name) was to protect African-Americans from police negligence/brutality and other social injustices that had taken place in earlier years. It was determined to protect the civil rights of their fellow man, “by
any means necessary.” The party advocated the usage of guns and other weapons for protection. Because of this, police considered it a serious threat.

The party developed what they termed “survival programs”, social programs to provide needed services to blacks and other poor people within the city. Such programs were pre-cursors to present free meal and childcare services. They also hosted voter registration drives as well as providing free breakfast and medical services. But the party’s ultimate goal was to make Oakland a base for revolution in America. These legacies were deeply embedded in the culture of the Bay Area long ago, undoubtedly influencing the movements that would come later.

Passing the Torch: Political Awareness Revived

As teenagers on the verge of adulthood in Berkeley and many of the surrounding cities, my friends and I learned early that activism is historically ingrained in many social aspects of life. The embedded legacy left behind by the Black Panthers and other likeminded groups acted as a distinct source of pride, and inevitably the spark for awareness in the next generation. The arrival of the new millennium introduced the next wave of the youth progressivism in the Bay Area, and all over the state. It has been one of the most powerful collective youth forces seen in almost forty years; referred to by some as the New Civil Rights Movement. Its primary focus was an attempt to train and develop the younger generations into becoming politically and socially conscious individuals, having yet to be put to the test.

In November 1996, Proposition 209 surfaced proposing an end to Affirmative Action programs in California. Much to the disappointment of many students, minorities in particular, the legislation was passed. Thousands of both high school and college
students gathered on the campus of the University of California (U.C.), Berkeley in Sproul Plaza, (the scene of numerous campus driven protests since the tumultuous decade of the 1960s), to force the UC regents to repeal the ban on affirmative action admissions.  

Following in March of 2000, just a few years later, *Proposition 21: the Juvenile Crime Initiative* quietly snuck its way onto ballots in a local election. The bill was supposedly designed as a solution to a surplus of crimes committed by California’s youth. If passed, *Proposition 21* would give attorneys the option to charge juvenile offenders (as young as fourteen years old) as adults and place them in adult prisons. It would also allow them to seek the death penalty for any “gang-related” crimes, and prosecute graffiti crimes as felonies. However, one of the most controversial things in the proposal, at least at my (Berkeley) high school, was the consent to “gang-profiling” at the discretion of local law enforcement. This meant that police officers could define a gang as “an informal group of three or more people wearing certain clothing”. Some local officers began to use the legislation as a means to threaten high school students.

The news of *Proposition 21* spread fast, far and wide in the months leading up to the vote. Renamed in the youth movement as “The War on Youth Initiative”, this bill understandably left teenagers very uneasy. I remember that feeling as my peers and I learned of the proposal and its possible implications for us. Overall, it would contribute greatly to the unjust criminal characterization of each young person. The government would need to spend over $300,000 of social program money to fund this initiative; “too much money to be spent trying to put kids in jail!”
In a way, it seemed that the government officials had tried to hide this legislation. Not only did it seem to appear out of thin air, but also there was no significant news coverage of the topic until protests began taking place. I, along with several other Berkeley High School students, participated in a school wide walkout coordinated with other schools in the area including Oakland and San Francisco. Some teachers actually encouraged students to leave, rescheduling their class activities for another time. We rallied together just as the students had done for the affirmative action protests on the U.C. Berkeley campus; this time the gathering took place in the parking lot of a local mall.

For many students the walkout was just another excuse to get out of class, catch a free ride on the BART, and mingle with people from other schools. I am not sure if the majority of them, myself included, truly understood the magnitude of this event. We had all heard of this proposition and the potential threats that its passing could lead to for our generation. I was satisfied in the feeling that that I had made a difference in the whole process.

The bill ultimately passed with sixty-two percent of the vote. An interesting point to consider though is that it failed in all four Bay Area counties; apparently someone took heed to our efforts, making it feel much more like a small victory than a defeat. Still, the whole idea remained unsettling for a long while. As a result of Proposition 21, the youth movement grew stronger.

Death to the Movement

The new movement of the Bay Area is one representative of a struggle for independence as the culture strives to set itself apart from other places. The cultural
elements found there are unlike anything one will find anywhere else. I spoke with a young woman who is native of Oakland; she referred to movement as an “era of ghetto unity”. Exactly how true her statement is, I cannot be sure. Just as with the Black Panthers almost half a century ago, the new influences in the Bay Area have been interpreted by law enforcement as taking on a threatening role.

As the new millennium set itself into motion, the city of Oakland once again climbed the ranks in crime and homicide statistics. Since the 1970s, the city has carried with it a reputation of high crime and rumors of a debilitated education system. The 1980s, referred to as the “crack-era”, ushered in an epidemic of extensive drug and alcohol abuse, and violent crime. Several other poverty-stricken inner cities suffered similar fates. Of all the cities in the state of California, Oakland has been ranked one of the highest (per capita) in carjacking, robbery, assault, drug possession/abuse, and homicide.16

The culture of the Bay Area has evolved over the years through the power of activism and the organization of movements and (for the most part) peaceful assemblies. But today, these young black boys have not only accepted but also adopted their labels as “juvenile delinquents” and “menaces to society”. This internalization of negative self image and perspective has led these boys into a dangerous trend. As we commit ourselves to the perceptions of others, we become what we are committed to. In other words, once we accept the negative perceptions that society places upon us, we become what they think we are. Disrespect of police and all law enforcement officials have become signs of maturity.
These boys have also begun a trend of assimilation. Peer pressure to conform, as I stated previously, has forced a lot of young boys into lives of crime and repressed individuality. In a place once largely defined by its freedom of personal expression, individuality has unceremoniously died, leaving behind, in its decaying remnants, an excess of Black boys standing on street corners in white t-shirts with mouths cloaked in gold, and dread-locked hair. Once a symbol of ancestral heritage, their hairstyles now serve as trademarks of defiance from all aspects of authority. As a result of such trends, the social climate of the Bay Area has changed drastically. Everything, including the fashion, culture, dancing and the music has shifted. However, very few, if any of these alterations have attributed to positive changes. Although I was born and raised in the Berkeley, California, returning there now feels very little like home; so many of the boys that I grew up with are ending up in jail, dying or worse.

**Casualties of War**

In a span of roughly five years, hundreds of people have been killed in a stream of (gun) violence. Most of them were young people, young African-Americans with the majority of the victims being men. I had been living in Texas for a little over a year by the time this violent epidemic began. I received a phone call one evening from my cousin, Jason. A mutual friend of ours was one of the first casualties in what was soon to become a devastatingly violent chain of events. That call was the first of many. Shortly after that, several more of the boys that I had grown up with became nameless, faceless statistics of violence.

The “codes” of the streets have undergone dramatic alterations as well. Long gone are the days when crowds of African-American men and women stood together to
peacefully assemble as one unit, in protest or otherwise. Nowadays an assembly of Black people spells trouble to anyone, including other Black people and especially to the authorities. And very few of these gatherings, if at all peaceful remain that way for very long. Crime is now equated with “achieving the ghetto authenticity.”

**The Documentary**

The process of making a documentary film begins much earlier than the first time you pick up a camera to shoot or sit down in an editing lab to log footage. It begins with a feeling, a desire to tell a story about something that means something personally. This process begins and ends with that feeling. In the third edition of his book, *Writing, Directing, and Producing Documentary Films and Videos*, filmmaker Alan Rosenthal makes a profound statement: “With technique alone, you can become a good filmmaker, but you will not become a great one. For that you need passion – passion for the personal message that no one asked you to talk about....” (371) Well, I want to be great. Over the course of this, my final semester as a college student, I have taken a journey in an attempt to discover that passion, that desire that had the greatest potential for me to achieve my goal. In doing so, I have created a “blueprint” for a film focusing on the process of raising boys, from a parental perspective. But the film will also focus on the actual struggle that is going on in the streets of the Bay Area, with these boys. There are some things that parents may not be aware of.

My interest in this subject has raised a few eyebrows. Even my mother is all but convinced that I am prepping her for a big announcement. Most of the concerns come in the form of questions like, “So do you have any kids?” (A question to which I answer “No”) and then the follow-up question, “Well then, what do you know about raising
Nothing, absolutely nothing; that is the point of this film. The first person I discussed this topic with was my mentor, Professor Melinda Levin. As an active and extremely successful independent filmmaker, Melinda has been a great influence and wonderful source of information. Having her as a mentor and a professor (she actually taught my very first RTVF course) has been immensely beneficial.

The Objective

There are two primary objectives for the making of this film: Ending the silence and bridging generational gaps. So much is changing, and very little of it for the better. There is something happening with the young boys out there that no one seems to want to talk about. If this trend of violence and criminal activity continues, a large number of them will be arrested and in jail before they are able to vote; those charged with felonies will never have the privilege of doing so. Because of the isolation of these incidents, few have received more than the minimal local media coverage.

Last year, MTV News sent its cameras to the Bay Area to explore the new youth movement. Hosted by Sway Calloway, MTV’s foremost hip-hop connoisseur and also a native of Oakland, California, the piece documents a new phenomenon sweeping the streets with its infectious energy. The “Hyphy” Movement (pronounced HIGH-fee; short for hyperactive), as it is being called, evolved from a combination of attitude, style of dress and music pioneered by regionally famous urban music producer Rick Rock. Rock is credited with creating a “soundtrack to fit the lifestyle...like break dancing, it has evolved into a culture.” The music has been a driving force behind this new movement, as it has for many of its predecessors. Music has historically been a key component of such demonstrations. The Civil Rights Movement, for example, relied on uplifting gospel
music, and the ever-meaningful proclamation-turned-anthem, “We Shall Overcome”, inspired by Martin Luther King’s legendary speech. The music of the Bay Area’s Hyphy Movement has succeeded in distinguishing the area from anyplace else, at least in communities heavily populated with ethnic minority groups (Black, Latino, Asian). It is a “sound developed largely in isolation: An out-of-towner really feels like an out-of-towner when [exposed to Bay Area] music scene,”\textsuperscript{18} comments one local rap artist.

Although this program succeeded in giving some notice to an area that I feel has been largely ignored by mainstream media in recent years, it did very little of anything else. The interviews consisted of local music talents, including producer Rick Rock. The entire segment focused primarily on the music, which is only the backdrop, the “soundtrack to the lifestyle”. Sway also interviewed kids on the street to get their opinions on the movement. Most of them spoke entirely in the local vernacular, which I would assume made the process of understanding things that much harder. Being that I am from the area, however, I was familiar with the local terminology. It highlighted the entertaining elements, but never addressed the serious issues. However, I was not surprised. After all, it was on MTV. One of the damaging effects of the (mass) media is that it sometimes results in the amplification of racial, gender, ethnic and other stereotypes. Perhaps my film will be able pick up the pieces, without exploiting people in the process.

The second objective is to help bridge the generational gaps. Much of the older generation feels that today’s youth take for granted what they fought and died for. In my research for this film, I found that grandparents are often supplementing parental roles after their sons or daughters are killed or incarcerated. Due to the fundamental differences
in lifestyle, neither side can understand the other which causes the gap. At times, it seems that the older generations resent the differences in education, lifestyle and socioeconomic structures of the younger generations. One study of this situation concluded, “Our generational gap is more than the wildness of youth…. It is a friction between people who do not understand each other, the same friction and frustration felt by business men and tourists…” The only foreseeable way to relieve these tensions is to talk, discuss the issues that are unclear from each generation. I am hoping to at least introduce a dialogue with my film, in further hopes of promoting a sense of empathy for the youth, and releasing fear.

Even those who work with youth through some of those previously mentioned programs are afraid, both for them and of them, especially young black men. Aaron Kipnis, Ph.d., a noted clinical psychologist in California works with at-risk youth in various clinics, juvenile halls and other treatment facilities. In his book, *Angry Young Men: How Parents, Teachers and Counselors Can Help “Bad Boys” Become Good Men*, Dr. Kipnis admits to feeling vulnerable around these boys outside the comfort of his work environment. Kipnis says that these types of fears are what cause many adults to “turn away from young men who do not fit our ideal molds for appearance and behavior.”

It also seems that many of them have adopted the motto of “Get rich or go to jail trying”. However due to the controversial “Three Strikes” legislation passed in California in 1994, which subjects felons with two prior convictions to an automatic twenty-five years to life sentence, this poses serious problems. Some interesting information to notice is that one-third of felony convictions are drug-related charges, non-violent crimes. And fifty percent of felony prisoners are between the ages of twenty and twenty-five.
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wonder if my cousin’s life would have turned out differently had he been aware of these statistics. Jeff Johnson, social activist, public speaker and host of Black Entertainment Television’s (BET) *Cousin Jeff Chronicles*, discussed this issue at a public forum:

"The youth of today are the leaders of today. If we fail to sow the seeds of education and real leadership into our young people today, we will be forced to reap the weeds of our ignorance versus flowers of our love tomorrow."20

Soon enough they will be paving paths of their own and making a way for the generations to come, just as those before them had done.

Too Close to Home: Ethical Concerns

Ethics is one of the most important considerations for any documentary film. With topics of a personal nature, this is a particularly essential topic of discussion. For me, the making of this film will undoubtedly be emotional. As I stated previously, I was born and raised for the majority of my life in the Bay Area. Although I have lived outside of the area for a little more than five years, through my family and friends I remain, in a sense, connected to the people and the culture. But as a filmmaker, I will be exploring these things as an outsider.

Despite my connections to the area, my last few visits have occasionally left me feeling like a tourist in a place that I once called home. There are some aspects and new cultural dynamics that baffle my mind as they do those from previous generations. This should make the transition from native to spectator somewhat easier, though many of the film’s subjects may be familiar to and with me. After all, I will be returning to the Bay Area as a college graduate and a filmmaker; those who know me personally will need to
address the situation with that in mind. Similarly, I will face the task of separating myself from the lives of friends and family members in order to be as objective as possible.

As the filmmaker on this project I will be faced with many controversial ethical decisions. Unlike with fiction films, documentary tells a real, “true” story of one or more people’s lives. It exposes and exploits them, generally in a manner that will be beneficial for the telling of their story. However, film also has the potential to produce some unflattering and unexpected outcomes. And it will be up to me to decide exactly when and where a line of ethics becomes blurred. Coming from a position of familiarity, I will be at a particular advantage. A great many of my interview subjects trust me; that trust will allow me more in-depth access to their lives than a stranger. When working with friends and family, a filmmaker must be especially careful. There may be things that they will share with you, on camera, because they trust you. In that process, they may divulge incriminating or embarrassing information. One must know at what point to shut the camera off and when to destroy footage.

Another ethical concern for this project is deciding whether or not to disclose every aspect of this film to the subjects. I have very strong personal opinions about the situations taking place with the young men in the Bay Area, which I why I opted to explore this particular topic. I feel that many of them are wasting their lives and progressing down extremely self-destructive paths. A few of my close family members and friends have become lost in this struggle including my cousin, Jason. I have questions that I personally want answered, for myself and for the film. Some of this film will undoubtedly reflect that. Is it unethical to withhold my feelings from the subject in order to capture them in their natural states? To do otherwise may cause them to feel the need
to “act” for the camera. Already slightly altered by the presence of the camera, the behavior should be kept as natural as possible as to not cheat the viewer of the full experience.

However, as I said before, I will not intentionally exploit the people in this film nor will I allow the film to do so. These people trust me as a person, and as a filmmaker; it is up to me not to violate that trust. In order to ensure that the footage does not cause problems for the interviewees I will have some trusted consultants view during post-production. No one, other than production crew will be allowed to view footage during production.

The Conclusion

As an emerging filmmaker, it is important for me to recognize my passions early. This time around that task was fairly simple. In the process of writing this paper, my cousin Jason was arrested again. Charged with a violation of his probation, this time he will be incarcerated for a while. The news of his arrest only strengthened my desire to make this film, not only for myself, but for others seeking answers as well. My family is not the only family affected by these tragedies, and thankfully we have considerably lesser events to deal with.

_Raising Boys_, the documentary will discuss many issues involved with the upbringing of children in the new American society. It will touch on general terms and situations while primarily focusing on the African-American experience in the Bay Area. The parents and other care providers interviewed in this film will share stories and memories of their experiences, but also any fears or concerns they may have for this next
Black boys are spiraling out of control with violence and drug related crimes. These boys have the opportunities for bright futures, and someone needs to say something about it. In addition to the parents, I will give the “boys” (this will include teenagers and adult men involved in the movement) to speak on their own behalf about the new movement that is taking place.

Above all, I hope to promote awareness from this film. I would like to see the generations of the past and present to come together and devise a plan to stop the madness before it claims the lives of many more Black boys.
Notes

The Process

The Village
5. Young Adult Project <www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/recreation/YAP>
8. San Francisco Peacemakers <www.sfpeacemakers.org>

Police Activities League
10. Police Activities League <www.calpal.org>

The Struggle

Historical Influence

Passing the Torch

Death to the Movement

Casualties of War

The Documentary
The Objective

Books
