

DADDY DON'T GO



Captured over two years, “Daddy Don’t Go” is a feature length documentary about four disadvantaged fathers in New York City as they struggle to beat the odds and defy the deadbeat dad stereotype. And the odds are real – men living in poverty are more than twice as likely to become absent fathers than their middle-class peers. Despite their hardships, Alex, Nelson, Roy and Omar shatter the deadbeat dad stereotype and redefine what it means to be a good father for all men.

“Daddy Don’t Go” was Executive Produced by the actors/activists Omar Epps and Malik Yoba and has screened at over 35 festivals, winning eight “Best Documentary” awards. It is currently airing on the Starz Network and is also available via [New Day Films](#) and [Kanopy](#).

THE DADS

Alex, 26, is a single father of West Indian descent who lives with his toddler son in a decaying Harlem shelter. “I gotta be dead or someone would have to beat me up for me to be a deadbeat dad,” says Alex when asked if he fears being separated from his son. Alex keeps Junior out of the foster care system but then faces a new challenge to his family’s well-being: possible jail time.



Roy, 29, is an ex-offender who has full custody of his toddler son Caiden. Roy and Caiden live with his parents as Roy tries to overcome his criminal past as well as a troubled relationship with his own father. Roy is determined to raise his own son differently than the way he grew up: “A 16-year old doesn’t catch a life-sentence for no reason...I won’t let my son have demons like I did.”



Omar, 36, has full-custody of three children with special needs. He strives to prove to the judge in Bronx Family Court that he is fit to parent in spite of multiple challenges. When Omar feels that his children are being jeopardized by his romantic relationship, he is faced with an impossible decision. “I feel like being a father is the only thing I’m good at and that’s what makes me not give up,” declares Omar.



Nelson, 27, is a former Latin King gang member and full-time daddy to his toddler son and two girls from his partner Rebecca’s previous relationships. Nelson is adamant about staying away from “street life” even in the face of unemployment. In his own words: “It’s real hard out here to get a job. Sometimes I feel like going back to my old ways but I choose not to. It’s not just me anymore, I have a family.”



THE FILMMAKERS



Pureland Pictures is a Bay Area based production company dedicated to creating character-driven fiction and documentary projects both large and small. Our films have premiered at Sundance and aired on Showtime, Starz, PBS, OWN, MTV and the Sundance channel. During its 18-year tenure, Pureland has built a strong reputation with clients for taking on delicate subject matter with skill and diplomacy. The company recently relocated from Brooklyn to Berkeley where Emily now resides with her family.



MALIK YOBA, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER starred in FOX's hit drama "New York Undercover," played a pivotal role in the first season of "Empire," and has gained cult status with the sci-fi epic "Alphas." As a father of three children and a lifelong advocate for children, families and community building, Yoba believes "Daddy Don't Go" comes at the right time to continue a much-needed conversation.

OMAR EPPS, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER is an award-winning actor, having starred in the hit FOX medical drama "House" for 8 seasons. Epps received an NAACP Image Award for "Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series" in both 2007 and 2008. As someone who grew up fatherless, the issues in "Daddy Don't Go" resonate with Omar personally and are close to his heart.



DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY: I'm a former New York City caseworker and "Daddy Don't Go" is my third documentary feature captured within the context of urban poverty. "Daddy Don't Go" pays homage to every man I've ever met who negates the "deadbeat dad" stereotype with a deep love for his children. These men, much like my own father, are often trying to be the dads they themselves never had. Yet despite their best efforts, they are often treated as "second-class parents" by government agencies and the family court system. The negative lens through which urban fathers are often viewed can only be undone by work from many angles – political, legal and social. I want to contribute to this effort by bringing new and positive images of urban fatherhood to a national audience. - Emily Abt





“Daddy Don’t Go” can be used as a discussion tool to make disadvantaged dads feel more “heard” and empowered. The film can also help...

- Inspire fathers to be present for their children regardless of financial circumstances
- Promote discussion about the importance of fatherhood and the evolving role of fathers society
- Dismantle the “deadbeat dad” stereotype and other negative stereotypes about disadvantaged fathers
- Analyze systemic challenges faced by fathers around the nation, including links between poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and family structure
- Service providers, decision makers, and other specific audiences develop greater empathy for disadvantaged fathers



EVENT FORMAT

Most screenings of “Daddy Don’t Go” take place over two hours (90 minutes to show the film followed by a 30-minute discussion). The format of your event depends on your objectives, for example...

- If the screening is intended as an empowerment tool for disadvantaged dads, make sure there is plenty of time for them to discuss their feelings after the screening and that they feel encouraged to do so. You may even want to “plant” a dad who begins the conversation.
- If the screening is intended as a training tool for caseworkers, use questions from our Discussion Guide to stimulate learning and cross-talk. Break the audience into smaller discussion groups for added impact.
- If the screening is meant to help shape organizational policy, bring in a moderator and/or a panel of experts to help guide the conversation. Consider inviting local organizations and other community partners to participate.
- If the screening is meant to inspire disadvantaged dads to lean into their parenting duties consider inviting one of the subjects of the film to do a Q&A after your screening. Contact us at info@purelandpictures.com to inquire about availability, rates, etc.

DISCUSSION GUIDE - WHY FATHERLESSNESS MATTERS



Many of the nation's top sociologists and policy makers consider fatherlessness to be the most pressing issue facing American families today. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly one in three children in the U.S. grow up without a father, placing them at a significantly higher risk to live in poverty, do poorly in school and run afoul of the criminal justice system. Since the 1970s, the number of children growing up without their father has risen from 10.3 percent to nearly 28 percent.

A 2014 study of over 40 million children and their parents by researchers at Harvard University found that family structure showed the strongest correlation with economic mobility — more so than other factors such as racial segregation, income inequality, school quality or social capital. Family structure is particularly important for fatherless boys who are more than twice as likely to become absent fathers themselves.



The “Deadbeat Dad” Stereotype

These alarming trends have led many to search for an explanation. What has changed in society that would explain the rise of single-parent households and the seeming ubiquity of fatherlessness, particularly in urban areas? Experts Kathryn Edin, David Blankenhorn and Andrew J. Cherlin all observe how public discourse on the subject has led to the perpetuation of a stereotype Edin refers to as the “hit and run” father. These are men who “run away, selfishly flee, [and] act like boys rather than men.” The inherent assumption in this generalization is that society’s increasing acceptance of these “deadbeat dads” has contributed to America’s fatherlessness epidemic.

While the number of fatherless homes has undoubtedly increased in recent decades, Edin notes that “the ‘hit and run’ image of unwed fatherhood is a caricature and not an accurate rendering – a caricature that obscures more than it reveals.” In many cases, writes Edin, the decisions of unwed, low-income fathers are contingent on their socioeconomic circumstances and not the result of selfish motivations.

The stories chronicled in “Daddy Don’t Go” echo this observation and reveal a far more nuanced image of modern fatherhood.



Changing Perceptions of Fatherhood

Dual-career families are now the norm and women are now the primary breadwinner in 40% of homes. As a result, women are no longer the main caregivers and fathers everywhere are stepping up their parenting.

The shifting role of men in the family unit is particularly evident in unwed fathers' relationships with the mothers of their children. Kathryn Edin, Michael Kimmel and David Blankenhorn have all noted how traditionally "American men were partners – usually husbands – first and parents second. Fatherhood was a 'package deal.' And it was the tie with the mother that bound men to their obligations to children." This concept of fatherhood no longer holds true, particularly for unwed fathers. The unwed fathers who choose to stay do so because they want to play an active role in their children's lives. Without the institution of marriage tying them to the role of breadwinner, these men are eager to share the role of caregiver.

The fathers of "Daddy Don't Go" exemplify these changes and each cites their children as their highest priority. Three of the fathers – Alex, Roy and Omar – are the primary caregivers for their children. By fully embracing and celebrating responsibilities that have traditionally belonged to mothers, these men are redefining the meaning of fatherhood.



Unemployment and Fatherhood

For unemployed men, the traditional role of the father as breadwinner is problematic. If being a provider is an essential part of fatherhood, how can a man be a good father without an income?

For many men, this means adjusting their definition of “providing” from comprehensive financial support to what Edin refers to as the “as needed” approach. “The ‘as needed’ approach to financial provision...is directly responsive to particular needs of the child, [and] is the method of support nearly all men prefer.” Edin notes how the fathers who are not able to give their child everything they need are eager and proud to provide what they can, when they can, as expenses for their child arise. Most men prefer to be judged on how much they provide given how little they currently have. “The ‘good provider’ is being redefined as the man who is ‘doing the best he can.’”

As we observe in “Daddy Don’t Go”, the image of a “good father” is a self-assessment that differs for all men and is based on their individual economic circumstances. Each of the fathers in “Daddy Don’t Go” are faced with unemployment and each addresses their responsibility to provide in different ways.



Urban Poverty and Fatherhood

Sociologist William Julius Wilson and civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander have both observed how chronic urban unemployment has a catalyzing effect on a host of social problems such as “broken families, antisocial behavior, social networks that do not extend beyond the confines of the ghetto environment, and a lack of informational social control over the behavior and activities of children and adults in the neighborhood.” There are also “strong links between single parenthood and poverty and welfare receipt.” Furthermore, children who grow up in single-parent households are more likely to establish single-parent households themselves.

The fathers of “Daddy Don’t Go” seek to break this cycle in several ways. Alex, for example, believes obtaining an education and full-time employment will improve his son’s economic prospects. Nelson attempts to relocate his family to Florida, where he hopes there will be more opportunities available than in their current Bronx neighborhood. The film captures their efforts to provide their children with a better future and invites viewers to consider these men’s struggles in the broader context of urban poverty.



The Social Support System for Fathers

In “Daddy Don’t Go”, we see the social support system currently in place for low-income fathers. As the film’s subjects navigate this system, we observe the ways in which they benefit from much-needed social support. We also see how the institutions in this system can complicate rather than simplify their lives.

As observed in the film, low-income men must submit to frequent drug screenings, anger management courses and parenting programs as a prerequisite to obtaining custody of their children. When these obligations are added to a single father’s already long list of responsibilities, their ability to properly parent is often negatively affected in spite of an agency’s intentions.

Omar’s story provides an example of how the pressures of the social support system can hinder a father’s ability to parent effectively. Faced with unemployment and homelessness, Omar struggles to regain custody of his children who have been placed in foster care. He finds himself spread thin between court appointments, parenting classes and efforts to find employment.

Roy, on the other hand, benefits from attending group therapy provided by the New York-based Forestdale Inc.’s Fatherhood Initiative. Certain fatherhood programs can alleviate the pressures low-income fathers face and provide them with the emotional tools they need to become more successful parents.

Example Discussion Questions

1. What did you learn about disadvantaged fathers from watching the film?
2. Did anything in the film surprise you?
3. Did anything in the film remind you of your own experiences?
4. What were some of the challenges faced by the fathers in the film? How were each of their challenges similar? Different?
5. What does the “deadbeat dad” stereotype mean to you? How do you see the fathers in the film in relation to that stereotype?
6. How do each of the fathers in the film fit or not fit into stereotypes of masculinity in the U.S.? Into traditional male/father roles in a family?
7. How did the criminal justice and court systems affect the lives of each father and their families?
8. What role did the government (federal and local) play in the lives of the fathers and families in the film?
9. How were social services involved in their lives? Were social support services beneficial/adequate?
10. How did unemployment affect the lives of the dads? How they saw themselves?
11. How did poverty affect the dads and their families? What seemed to be some of the root causes?
12. How do privilege and disadvantage play out in the lives of the fathers and families in the film?
13. How does the film relate to your profession/field of study?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & FURTHER READING

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