P.O.V. Discussion Guide

Hardwood
A Film by Hubert Davis
Dear Viewer,

*Hardwood* started out as an idea to do a film about my father. I always felt he was such an interesting character and had led such an incredible life—from growing up in the slums of Chicago, raised by a teenage mother who had him when she was fourteen years old, to escaping through his love of basketball and traveling the world with the Harlem Globetrotters for eighteen years.

Behind that story, I wanted to explore the story of a man who while on the road with the Globetrotters still searched for the father who had abandoned his mother and him when he was four years old. I wanted to illustrate the parallel between that void left in my dad’s life and his role as a father figure in the communities of Chicago and now Vancouver, working with young people, teaching them basketball.

A huge transition in the story happened while I was still working on the treatment. The question of why I was telling it came up. What was my role in this story? Once I decided to put myself into the documentary, it became a story about my family. In particular, *Hardwood* became a story about my dad’s two families—his first family in Chicago with his ex-wife, Mary Etta, and my brother, Mawuli, and his second family with my mom and me in Vancouver.

After speaking with my brother, I really felt that I had made the right choice in telling my family’s story from a personal point of view. Mawuli encouraged me, saying that the personal story was the one that had never really been told, while my father’s involvement with the Globetrotters had been well publicized.

One of the gifts I received while working on the project was my dad’s trust in letting me delve into his life for better or worse. He really showed courage in giving me complete freedom to make *Hardwood* the way I saw fit.

The hardest part of making such a personal story was putting my family in uncomfortable positions, asking them questions that sometimes brought up painful memories. Another challenge was finding out new things during the process of shooting: for example, seeing the resentment my brother carried with him about my mom and dad’s relationship, realizing the depth of my mom’s heartbreak in losing my dad when he went back to Chicago and married his first wife, Mary Etta, and witnessing Mary Etta’s pain as she talked about trying to make a rocky marriage work.

In shooting the story, I wanted it to feel intimate; I wanted people watching the documentary to feel like they were getting a glance into someone else’s family album. What came out of shooting was much more raw than what I first anticipated. My family gave so much of themselves. For example, Mary Etta, who was hesitant to come forward originally, participated for the love of her son and for me; she opened herself up with the hope that my brother and I could heal those old wounds and move forward in our lives.

After shooting and editing *Hardwood*, my main concern was that my family would be happy with it. I wanted everyone to feel that I had told their stories honestly. The hardest part was the short length of time in which I was given to tell the story, only a half-hour. There was a lot of the story, in particular about my mom and Mary Etta’s experiences, that I could not include. I decided that this story was really about my father and his two sons. That had been the original idea and I just kept coming back to it.

After making *Hardwood*, I felt that I had a much better appreciation for my family, for their incredible strength and the complexities that they had overcome in their lives. Ultimately, I feel so much closer to them having gone through this experience, and that is the real blessing.

**Hubert Davis**
Writer/Director/Editor, *Hardwood*
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Hubert Davis
Filmmaker, Hardwood
Former Harlem Globetrotter Mel Davis fathered two sons. Hubert was the son of Mel’s first true love (Megan) a Canadian white woman with whom marriage seemed impossible in 1963 when they met. Mawuli was the son of Mary Etta, the black woman from Chicago whom Mel married in 1966. Hardwood recounts the tale of these two families as seen through the eyes of Hubert. Davis delves into his father’s past in the hope of shedding light on his own future.

For many years, Davis did not know his father, and it wasn’t until Mel was divorced from his first wife and married Hubert’s mother that Hubert first met his brother, Mawuli. The resulting complex web of love, betrayal, and family bonds will resonate with anyone who has lived through divorce, affairs, or single-parenthood.

Davis gives each family member a chance to speak. His father, mother, brother, and stepmother all reflect on their experiences. Their ability to forgive without condoning wrongdoing and their willingness to learn from their experiences and accept one another in new family roles will inspire viewers. The film’s background of race and racism makes Hardwood a compelling tool for community outreach.
**Event Ideas**

Use a screening of *Hardwood* to:

- Convene a meeting of teen fathers. Help participants explore the importance of fathers and the ways that they can positively contribute to their children’s lives.
- Kick off a genealogy research project with families in your community. Arrange for follow-up opportunities where people can share what they learn about their heritage.

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**Potential Partners**

*Hardwood* is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and P.O.V. films relating to race or fatherhood, including *American Love Story*, *Family Name*, and *Kelly Loves Tony*
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed to the right
- Legislators
- High school students
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities, community colleges, and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as P.O.V.’s national partners Elderhostel Learning in Retirement Centers, members of the Listen Up! Youth Media Network, or your local library

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**Key Issues**

*Hardwood* is an excellent tool for outreach because it presents a compelling human story that will resonate with the family experiences of many different audiences. The film will be of special interest to people interested in exploring or working on the issues below:

- Autobiography
- Basketball
- Family dynamics
- Fatherhood
- Gender roles
- Parenting
- Psychology
- Race relations
- Racial identity
- Racism
- Sociology
- Sports
- U.S. history

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This guide is designed to help you use *Hardwood* as the centerpiece of a community event. It contains suggestions for organizing an event as well as ideas for how to help participants think more deeply about the issues in the film. The discussion questions are designed for a very wide range of audiences. Rather than attempt to address them all, choose one or two that best meet the needs and interests of your group.

### Planning an Event

In addition to showcasing documentary films as an art form, screenings of P.O.V. films can be used to present information, get people interested in taking action on an issue, provide opportunities for people from different groups or perspectives to exchange views, and/or create space for reflection. Using the questions below as a planning checklist will help ensure a high-quality/high-impact event.

- **Have you defined your goals?** With your partner(s), set realistic goals. Will you host a single event or engage in an ongoing project? Being clear about your goals will make it much easier to structure the event, target publicity, and evaluate results.

- **Does the way you are planning to structure the event fit your goals?** Do you need an outside facilitator, translator, or sign-language interpreter? If your goal is to share information, are there local experts on the topic who should be present? How large an audience do you want? (Large groups are appropriate for information exchanges. Small groups allow for more intensive dialogue.)

- **Have you arranged to involve all stakeholders?** It is especially important that people be allowed to speak for themselves. If your group is planning to take action that affects people other than those present, how will you give voice to those not in the room?

- **Is the event being held in a space where all participants will feel equally comfortable?** Is the space wheelchair accessible? Is it in a part of town that’s easy to reach by various kinds of transportation? If you are bringing together different constituencies, is it neutral territory? Does the physical configuration allow for the kind of discussion you hope to have?

- **Will the set-up of the room help you meet your goals?** Is it comfortable? If you intend to have a discussion, can people see one another? Are there spaces to use for small breakout groups? Can everyone easily see the screen and hear the film?

- **Have you scheduled time to plan for action?** Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even when the discussion has been difficult. Action steps are especially important for people who already have a good deal of experience talking about the issue(s) on the table. For those who are new to the issue(s), just engaging in public discussion serves as an action step.
Facilitating a Discussion

Controversial topics often make for excellent discussions. By their nature, those same topics also give rise to deep emotions and strongly held beliefs. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere where people feel safe, encouraged, and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share openly and honestly. Here’s how:

Preparing Yourself

Identify your own hot-button issues. View the film before your event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren’t dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.

Be knowledgeable. You don’t need to be an expert on the history of racism or the sociology of families to lead an event, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. In addition to the Background Information section above, you may want to take a look at the suggested websites and books in the Resources section on p. 16.

Be clear about your role. You may find yourself taking on several roles for an event, e.g., host, organizer, or even projectionist. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion. Keep in mind that being a facilitator is not the same as being a teacher. A teacher’s job is to convey specific information. In contrast, a facilitator remains neutral, helping to move along the discussion without imposing his or her views on the dialogue.

Know your group. Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue or have they dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion, and socioeconomic class, can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point of view. If you are bringing together different segments of your community, we strongly recommend hiring an experienced facilitator.

Finding a Facilitator

Some university professors, human resource professionals, clergy, and youth leaders may be specially trained in facilitation skills. In addition to these local resources, groups such as the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) may be able to provide or help you locate skilled facilitators.
Preparing the Group

Consider how well group members know one another. If you are bringing together people who have never met, you may want to devote some time at the beginning of the event for introductions.

Agree to ground rules around language. Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect and aid clarity. Typically, such rules include no yelling or use of slurs and asking people to speak in the first person (“I think . . .”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that . . .”).

Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion. If the group is large, are there plans to break into small groups or partners, or should attendance be limited?

Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate. In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening to each other actively. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue. This will be especially important in preventing a discussion from dissolving into a repetitive, rhetorical political or religious debate.

Encourage active listening. Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening, as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas. You may also consider asking people to practice formal “active listening,” where participants listen without interrupting the speaker, then re-phrase to see if they have heard correctly.

Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his or her own experience. Who we are influences how we interpret what we see. So everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film they have just seen, and all of them may be accurate. It can help people to understand one another’s perspectives if people identify the evidence on which they base their opinion as well as share their views.

Take care of yourself and group members. If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space to “vent,” perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. If you anticipate that your topic may upset people, be prepared to refer them to local support agencies and/or have local professionals present. Think carefully about what you ask people to share publicly, and explain things like confidentiality and whether or not press will be present.
Interracial Marriage

When Mel and Megan met in the 1960s, not only were interracial unions socially unacceptable, in many U.S. states they were also illegal. Laws against miscegenation—marriage between whites and non-whites—were able to be enforced until a 1967 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court (Loving v. Virginia) found that such laws illegally discriminated on the basis of race.

The Harlem Globetrotters

In 1924, Abe Saperstein began a basketball team that would travel to communities and take on local challengers for a cut of the event’s proceeds. That team would soon be called the Globetrotters. In 1930, Harlem was added to the team name to indicate that all the players were black. In actuality, the Globetrotters hailed from Hinckley, Illinois, and wouldn’t play a game in Harlem until 1968.

Initially, games were competitive, with the Globetrotters nearly always victorious. Opponents would eventually include newly founded NBA teams at a time when blacks were not permitted on NBA squads. A Globetrotter—Nathaniel “Sweetwater” Clifton—would be the first black man to play in the NBA.

In one 1939 game, the team found itself leading by more than one hundred points against a team of locals. Players began to clown around and found that the audience loved it. By the 1940s, the Globetrotters had developed that clowning into a fine art. In addition to developing many of the routines for which they are now famous, many people also credit the team with introducing features now familiar to current basketball fans, from the center as pivot player to the slam-dunk.

Touted as “goodwill ambassadors,” the Globetrotters have represented blacks to whites and Americans to other nations. They have also generated millions of dollars for charity causes.

(Source: harlemglobetrotters.com)
Selected People Featured in *Hardwood*

**Mel Davis**—Harlem Globetrotter, basketball coach, father of Mawuli and Hubert

**Hubert Davis**—filmmaker and Mel’s son with Megan

**Mawuli Mel Davis**—Mel’s son with Mary Etta

**Megan Carvell Davis**—Mel’s white lover and eventually wife in Vancouver

**Mary Etta**—Mel’s black wife in Chicago
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you may want to pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can’t engage until they have had a break, don’t encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won’t lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question, such as

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask them?
- Did anything in this film surprise you? If so, what? Why was it surprising?
- What insights, inspiration, or new knowledge did you gain from this film?
- Two months from now, what do you think you will remember from this film and why?
Race

How did racism influence Mel’s choices? What role did racism play in his decision to marry a black woman while he was in love with a white woman?

Earl Smith says that before integration, “The only way we thought we was going to get out of the inner city was through sports.” In reality, only a tiny percentage of those who play sports ever get to play professionally, so why does this notion of sports as a “way out” persist?

Hubert says, “I couldn’t figure out why my life was so different from everyone else’s. And I guess I was ashamed of it.” At the same time, he grew up in a Vancouver community and knew other kids with white moms and black dads. What difference does it make to live in communities with people who look like us?

Fathers, Husbands, Family

What do you think Mel’s sons have learned from their father?
What did you learn from the film about fatherhood? What makes a good father? Mel says, “A father has to coach his son in all types of life.” Do you find this description of a father’s responsibility compelling? Why or why not?

Mary Etta acknowledges that neither she nor Mel had relationships with their fathers: “with no marriage to model after . . . We’re just finding our way.” What parts of his childhood did Mel repeat as an adult? In your experience, in what ways do people repeat the patterns they see in childhood?

The filmmaker says, “Each one of us is born with a set pattern in life. It is handed down to us from our parents as it was handed down to them from theirs, each generation reliving the past. But sometimes a new pattern emerges, a path allowing us to change our lives in a profound way.” In your experience, how do people break cycles of destructive patterns? In this instance, what role did changing attitudes about race play in providing Mel’s children with a new pattern?

Divide into five groups and assign each group the point of view of one of the central people in the film (Mel, Hubert, Mawuli, Mary Etta, Megan). Have each group tell the family history from their own perspective. Compare the stories. What is similar and what is different in each account? What do you learn about how the same set of events can be seen and experienced differently by different people? What do you learn about the difference in impact on adults and children?

Since Mel could not be with both of his families at the same time, he was both present and absent from his sons’ lives. What was the impact of his absence? How was his sons’ experience similar to and different from other children of divorce?
Hubert says, “To really understand my dad, I had to know where he was coming from. And to really understand my family, I had to see what they had been through.” In your view, what is the importance of family stories? What happens when families keep secrets? If family stories are important, what is the impact of family secrets?

In your view, what is the significance of the film’s three segment titles: “Love,” “Recollection,” and “Redemption”? How does each of these relate to the others?

**Sports**

Mel says that, “To make a person a better basketball player you’ve got to teach the person to be a good person.” In your experience, what specific things in sports help young people learn to “be a good person”? What are the potential pitfalls of participation in sports? How might you ensure that participation in your school or community sports teams provides the benefits and avoids the problems that you listed?

Mawuli says, “So we would be talking about life but we would talk about it through basketball.” Describe times when you have seen sports provide bonding opportunities between family members. Have you also seen times when sports becomes a substitute for deep or genuine bonding? How do you tell the difference between sports as bonding and sports as substitute?

Mawuli says, “I knew I’d never turn out to be the kind of ballplayer Daddy was, but I knew that I could be that kind of person and I could contribute to my community in that kind of way.” In what ways did Mel contribute to his community?
• Read Mawuli’s letter (see handout on p. 15). Write your own letter to someone who has been an important influence in your life. Include both what you learned and what you needed to learn but didn’t get. If that person is still alive, consider sharing it with him or her.

• Convene a meeting between experienced fathers and new, expectant, or teen fathers. Have the new fathers write down questions. Let a facilitator pose the questions to the experienced dads and/or use the questions to spark an open dialogue. If appropriate, pair up each new father with a more experienced counterpart who can serve as a mentor.

• Document the history of your own family in a form that can be handed down to future generations.

• Found or support a sports program in your community that provides young people with positive experiences and strong role models.

• Bo Ellis remembers that, “All my male influence and guidance, it started in a place like the park, individuals like Mel went when I was a young man, he reached out to me.” Brainstorm places in your community where young people can go to find adult guidance, especially if such guidance isn’t available at home. Survey youth in your community to find out which of the venues on the list are places they actually go or would feel comfortable going to. Find ways to support the opportunities available at those places.
There are some things that I had to figure out, painful. There are some things I never had to figure out, thankful. I had to figure out how to be honest to my son’s mother, to be a husband to their mother and not to try to own their mother. My wife, my woman. To keep my hands off of my son’s mama, to heal my past pain so that I have room to absorb my son’s pains when they come. How to be present even when my money is not right because he is in high school and there are things that he can’t learn from high school buddies about women, fighting, drugs, drinking, life, that I can’t tell him in drive-by lectures. But there are other things that I did not have to figure out, things you taught me well. I never had to figure out how to get myself up every morning and work long hours away from my family to support my family. How to go on family trips, how to dance around the house with my son. How to hold my son’s hand. How to let my son know that I’m disappointed without breaking his spirit. How to show my son how to take something apart around the house to fix it and not be able to put it back together again. How to make my son think I’m the strongest and toughest man in the world. How to cry in front of my son. How to blame their mother for being late to everything. How to love my sons in the way that no matter what I do or not do and no matter where they go or what they do, they’ll always be able to know in their hearts that I love them, I love them, I love them. There are some things I had to figure out, painful. There are some I never had to figure out, thankful.

Mawuli Mel Davis
WEBSITES

The film

P.O.V.’s Hardwood Website
www.pbs.org/pov/pov2005/hardwood

The Hardwood companion website offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Hubert Davis, ample opportunities for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features:

OVERVIEW

History of the Harlem Globetrotters

Today they are best known for ball-handling and comedy routines, but the Globetrotters have a long history of serious basketball play, and their beginnings were modest. Learn more about their fabulous history, and hear from Mel Davis about what it was like to be a part of the team in an exclusive interview.

DISCOVER MORE

Fathers, Sons and B-Ball

The film reflects powerfully on a variety of themes, including fathers and sons, interracial family relationships and basketball’s life lessons. Ruminate over these topics in the writings of John Edgar Wideman and James McBride, and read the text of the letter Hubert’s brother, Mawuli, shares in the film.

What’s Your P.O.V.?

P.O.V.’s online Talking Back Tapestry is a colorful, interactive representation of your feelings about Hardwood. Listen to other P.O.V. viewers talk about the film and add your thoughts by calling 1-800-688-4768. www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback.html

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY PROCESSES

www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/family.html

Prof. Michael C. Kearl at Trinity University has compiled an excellent overview of the history and sociology of the family.

“WHY THE UGLY RHETORIC AGAINST GAY MARRIAGE IS FAMILIAR TO THIS HISTORIAN OF MISCEGENATION”
http://hnn.us/articles/printfriendly/4708.html

Though the title of this article by Prof. Peggy Pascoe (University of Oregon) indicates that it is primarily about arguments for and against gay marriage, it includes an excellent summary of the history of U.S. laws against miscegenation.

THE HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS

www.harlemglobetrotters.com

The official website of the Harlem Globetrotters provides a complete history of the team.
How to Buy the Film

For ordering information on *Hardwood*, please visit www.nfb.ca.

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and entering its 18th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 220 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, P.O.V.'s Borders. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today’s most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

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**P.O.V. Interactive**

[www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.’s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, P.O.V.’s Borders. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information, and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique Talking Back feature, filmmaker interviews, and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

**American Documentary, Inc.**

[www.americandocumentary.org](http://www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying, and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on-line, and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

**P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education**

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.’s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools, and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.’s films.

Front cover photo:

*Mel Davis on the basketball court.*

Photo: Nicole Gurney

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