



For Immediate Release

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**School in Rural Kenya Offers Hope to Baltimore's Embattled Youth
In P.O.V.'s "The Boys of Baraka" Premiering Tuesday, Sept. 12 on PBS**

Winner of NAACP Image Award and Awards at Chicago, Atlanta, Newport,
South by Southwest, and SILVERDOCS Film Festivals

A Co-production of ITVS, Produced in Association with American Documentary | P.O.V.

"In a city plagued by poverty where African-American boys are left behind more often than other children, a film documenting the unusual education of four has inspired the mayor to seek solutions to Baltimore's educational problems." – Emma Daly, The New York Times

The Boys of Baraka reveals the human face of a tragic statistic—61 percent of Baltimore's African-American boys fail to graduate from high school; 50 percent of them go on to jail. Behind those grim figures lie the grimmer realities of streets ruled by drug dealers, families fractured by addiction and prison, and a public school system seemingly surrendered to chaos. As eloquently portrayed in Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's award-winning documentary having its national broadcast premiere on public television's P.O.V., a generation of inner-city children faces dilemmas that would undo most adults. In this case, they are told early on that they face three stark "dress" options by their 18th birthdays – prison orange, a suit in a box, or a high school cap and gown.

The four young boys featured in **The Boys of Baraka**, despite individual talents and considerable personal charms, cannot escape the common fate expressed by those dress options. But fate, as documented in this film, comes to them with a remarkable and fickle twist—an experimental boarding school in rural Kenya.

Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's **The Boys of Baraka** airs **Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2006** at 10 p.m. on PBS, as part of the 19th season of public television's P.O.V. series. (Check local listings.) The film won an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Independent or Foreign Film, as well as Best Documentary Awards at the Chicago and Newport film festivals, a special Jury Award at South by Southwest (SXSW), and Audience Awards at the Woodstock and SILVERDOCS film festivals. P.O.V. is American television's longest-running independent documentary series, and is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

Devon Brown, Montrey Moore, Richard Keyser, Jr., and Richard's younger brother, Romesh Vance, are just at that age—12 and 13 years old—when boys start to become men. On the harsh streets of a city like Baltimore, Md., where the four boys live, that passage presents far more make-or-break, even life-or-death, choices than anything faced by their counterparts in the suburbs or the middle-class districts of the city. Will they succumb to the lure of the drug trade? Will they, against the odds, continue their education? Or will they simply, one day, whether the intended target or not, stop a bullet? Given the odds against them, do these boys have the power to make a choice?

Richard speaks with charming bluster about being strong, but is troubled by his absent father's imprisonment and about his little brother's prospects growing up in the projects. Romesh is already suspicious and downbeat. Montrey is compulsively mischievous and contentious, fighting with other boys and earning multiple suspensions from school. Devon seems to have found a way, preaching in the local church with precocious confidence while coping with his mother's repeated bouts with addiction and prison.

The Boys of Baraka shows that despite the most difficult circumstances, the boys can draw on the traditional strengths of the black community, church, and family. The latter may present them with a mixed legacy; the extended family pulls together to make up for members succumbing to the social blights of poverty and the drug culture. But the enthusiastic support of family and community are critical when a rare opportunity comes to the boys to join 16 other inner city black youths in attending an experimental boarding school. Their families know instinctively that virtually any educational opportunity besides the Baltimore public schools will offer their children a lifeline—even if it is located in the rural bush land of Kenya in east Africa.

Founded by the private Abell Foundation in 1996, the Baraka School—"baraka" means blessing in Kiswahili, the native spoken language of eastern Africa—was designed to give "at risk" African-American boys from Baltimore a chance to learn academically and grow personally in an environment far removed from their troubled neighborhoods. Without television, Game Boys, and fast food, and exposed to the hardworking and socially rich life of rural Africans, the boys are given a more disciplined structure and the kind of educational attention (a five-to-one student-teacher ratio) normally reserved for better-heeled private schools.

The boys themselves understand that this is a chance for them to change their lives, but it's difficult to imagine 12-year-olds making a leap to rural Africa without the presence of their families and friends. In **The Boys of Baraka**, the filmmakers have crafted the *vérité* tale of the Baraka class, including Devon, Montrey, Richard, and Romesh, that left for Kenya in September 2002 for the first of two years of schooling, corresponding to the seventh and eighth grades. The overriding goal is to have the kids gain educational confidence and direction and to go on to at least graduate from high school. The Baraka School had a good record in the effort. In contrast to Baltimore's public schools, three out of four Baraka students were graduating high school.

Africa is, at first, both wonderful and disorienting, with the boys reveling in a chance to be children discovering lizards or playing pranks without fear of gunfire. Then homesickness and discontent with the school's discipline take hold. Romesh even sets off in a futile effort to drag his pack to the distant airport. But then a transformation begins to take place.

By the time they return to Baltimore for summer vacation, they share a new enthusiasm for education and a greater confidence in their abilities. It's a striking flowering of hope, not only for the boys but also for their families. Then unexpected news comes for Devon, Montrey, Richard, and Romesh and their families. How each of the boys responds to this dramatic twist of fate may be the most surprising thing about **The Boys of Baraka**.

"It was both exhilarating and sobering to follow these kids through a couple of years of grappling with one of the best breaks they may ever have," says co-director/producer Heidi Ewing. "The film zeroes in on kids that society has given up on—boys with every disadvantage—but who refuse to be 'throw-aways,'" says Rachel Grady, her directing/producing partner.

The Boys of Baraka is a co-production of the Independent Television Service (ITVS), produced in association with American Documentary | P.O.V.

About the filmmakers:

Heidi Ewing

Co-Producer/Director

As the co-owner of New York-based Loki Films, Heidi Ewing has taken on a wide variety of subjects from Scientology (for A&E) to the criminal justice system in the Bronx (Discovery Channel). Previously, she delved into the dramatic world of Cuban politics with **Dissident**, a film about the struggle of Havana-based Nobel Peace Prize nominee Oswaldo Paya that premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival to critical and industry praise. She is currently co-directing **Jesus Camp** (in collaboration with A&E IndieFilms), her second documentary feature. The film focuses on a summer camp for evangelical children who are training to become the next generation of Christian prophets.

Rachel Grady

Co-Producer/Director

A private investigator turned filmmaker, Rachel Grady has produced and directed numerous nonfiction films for The Discovery Channel, A & E and Britain's Channel 4. She has directed several films that focus on a mental illness including **Mad Justice**, a *vérité* documentary that looks at the troubling fate of mentally ill parolees, and **Ward 2 West**, shot on location at the Kirby Forensic Psychiatric Hospital on New York's Ward's Island. She also was the series producer for **TX**, an eight-part series for VH1 filmed entirely in a drug rehabilitation facility. She is currently co-directing her second documentary feature, *Jesus Camp*. Grady is the co-founder of Loki Films.

Credits:

Executive Producers:	Sally Jo Fifer for ITVS, Cara Mertes for P.O.V.
Co-Producers/Directors:	Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady
Cinematographers:	Marco Franzoni and Tony Hardmon
Editor:	Enat Sidi
Original Score:	JJ McGeehan
Creative Consultant:	Sam Pollard
Associate Producer:	Jeremy Duhme

Running Time: 86:46

Awards & Festivals:

- NAACP Image Award, Outstanding Independent or Foreign Film, 2006
- Gold Hugo, Best Documentary Feature/Aquafina Pure Vision Award, Chicago International Film Festival, 2005
- Best Documentary, Atlanta Film Festival, 2005
- Best Documentary, Newport International Film Festival, 2005
- Special Jury Award, South by Southwest Film Festival (SXSW), 2005
- Audience Award, Woodstock Film Festival, 2005
- Audience Award, SILVERDOCS Film Festival, 2005

Co-Presenters:



ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the PBS series *Independent Lens*. ITVS was established by an historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have helped to revitalize the relationship between the public and public television. ITVS is funded by the

Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For more information, please visit www.itvs.org.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and in its 19th 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 October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought nearly 250 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.

P.O.V. Interactive (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, viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives, which include myriad special sites from previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

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. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement initiative, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, PBS, and public television viewers. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television station including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/ WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (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. Cara Mertes is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

Media Sponsor:



TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.

