

RESEARCH

“ Black men are amongst the most studied species on the planet. Apparently, there are more studies of black men than there are of sharks. But for all that study, what’s left out is black men’s humanity. Their emotions. ”

Dori Maynard, president, Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education

As Maynard provocatively notes, there is no shortage of research on black men and boys. Indeed, there are a number of university-based institutes with a research agenda that focuses on black males, including the UCLA Black Male Institute and the Morehouse Male Initiative (see map on p. 25 of major research centers). In addition to research produced by academia, nonprofits and think tanks also contribute to the research literature. Much of the existing research highlights the disparities between black males and other population groups, particularly within the realm of education and criminal justice.

Frustrated by “gloom-and-doom statistics” being the only story told, scholars like Shaun Harper and Ivory Toldson have contributed to the academic literature by studying factors that promote black male success. Reports like *Succeeding in the City* and *Breaking Barriers*, written by Harper and Toldson, respectively, challenge deficit-oriented representations of black males. As Harper says, this is a “commonsense approach. If we want to better understand how to improve success among young men of color, then we probably should study young men of color who have been successful and learn from their success.” Building this body of research is critical to directing the field toward assets-focused, community-based solutions.

Despite the efforts of Harper, Toldson, and others, our interviewees generally agreed that the field can benefit from greater engagement by the academic community. Loren Harris observes, “We have really smart folks in the academy who are not connected to the field in an everyday sort of way.”

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Shaun Harper, executive director, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education

Academic engagement is vital in light of the prevailing discourse around black men and boys. Toldson, a former professor at Howard University who now serves as the deputy director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), describes some of his work as “policing how we talk about black male students.

RESEARCH INSTITUTES WITH A FOCUS ON BLACK MEN & BOYS

NATIONAL

Scholars Network on Black Masculinity

ROBERT MORRIS UNIVERSITY

Uzuri Think Tank



UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education



ARCADIA UNIVERSITY

Black Male Development Symposium



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools



University of California, Los Angeles

UCLA Black Male Institute



UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

African-American Male Initiative



LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy, New Orleans Fatherhood Consortium



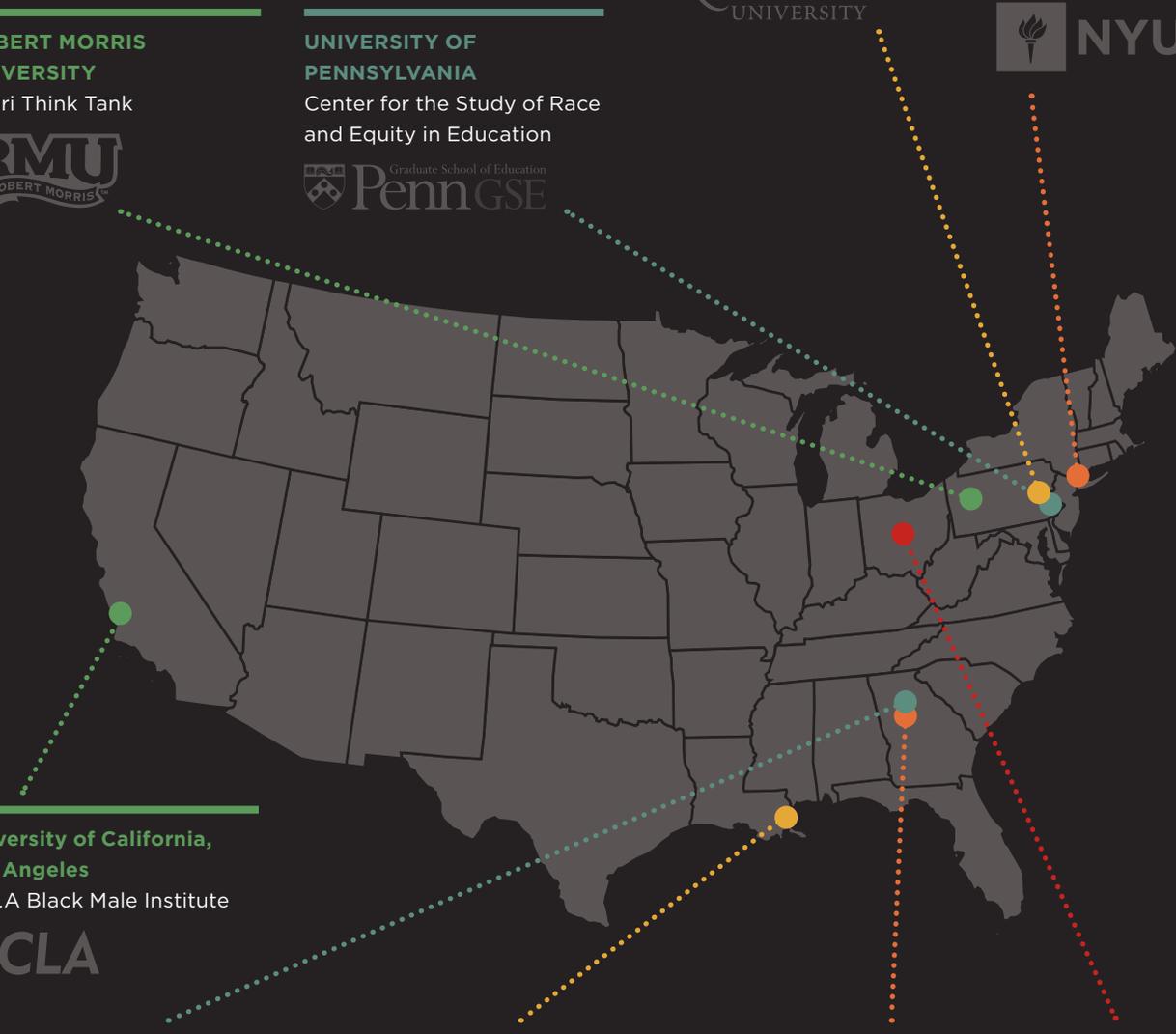
MOREHOUSE COLLEGE

Morehouse Male Initiative



OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male





THE SCHOLARS NETWORK ON BLACK MASCULINITY

gathers members of the academic community to reshape scholarly and public understanding of the lives of African-American men. The Network achieves this through workshops and conferences for its members, as well as public outreach and dissemination of research findings.

When people say things like, ‘The black man is a dying breed,’ those are things I’m very sensitive about and I’m constantly challenging that. Also the general misuse of statistics, like ‘There are more black men in prison than in college.’ I wrote a series of reports challenging that.”

Deeper scholarly engagement can also ensure that research gaps identified by the field are addressed. Some of these gaps include black male masculinity, sexual identity, and the development of emotional intelligence and softer skills.

Within the academy, the added challenge can be the perception of this area of research. According to Alford Young, Jr., “It’s still largely seen as a topic that people do when they can’t do the so-called real work in academic disciplines.” Young, who chairs the University of Michigan’s Department of Sociology, initiated the Scholars Network on Black Masculinity to connect academics around the country who are committed to scholarship that develops new visions of black men and masculinity.

In order for scholarly findings to impact programs and policies, it is important that this work be

translated for a broader audience. Young notes that working with practitioners and policymakers is “a very different animal from constructing a paper.” There are several efforts to bridge this gap. Rhonda Tsoi-a-Fatt Bryant of the Center for Law and Social Policy tapped the Scholars Network in 2012 and initiated the Partnership Circle, fostering conversations between researchers and policymakers with an interest in black men and boys. The goal of this group is to build relationships between the two so that strong research informs policy recommendations and that policymakers in need of specific research can readily access research partners.

Shaun Harper, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, regularly presents at black male summits on college campuses and national convenings on higher education. He has written translation pieces and consulted for college administrators to help inform institutional policies that promote black male academic success. In 2013, he was invited to speak at the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, where a 45-minute keynote address extended to a two-and-a-half-hour Q&A session, as legislators asked for advice about education policy issues in their respective states.



Photos: Urban Prep Academies