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Churches working to save more than souls

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J285 LONGFORM TV: THESIS PROJECT
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Churches working to save more than souls

This longform television project examines the growing popularity of singles ministries--social and religious support groups for the unmarried--within historically black churches.

In America today, black women are less likely to be married than any other group--only 42 percent according to a Yale study. For black, educated women the likelihood of marriage drops further--only around 30 percent are married.

Black women are also one of the most religious groups in America. As such, many of them are turning to church to find solutions to low marriage rates. And many churches are responding to this demand through singles ministries.

Traditionally, single ministries have been a place for older, widowed or divorced congregants to gather together for fellowship and prayer. Today, they are populated primarily with younger members and play host to social activities outside the church. While they make no explicit claims of being a matchmaking service, most ministries feature regular discussion groups on dating practices and strategies for finding a life companion.

Nowhere is this trend in singles ministries more visible than in the D.C. Metropolitan Area where only 17 percent of African Americans are married. This project focuses on the popular singles ministry at Alfred Street Baptist Church in nearby Alexandria, Va. Interviews include Monique Williams, an active singles ministry member who believes these organization are a critical service in black churches; Rodney Garrett, the director of the singles ministry who speaks to the big shifts in the church's demographics (he says 80% of new members are single, mostly female); and Brittini Brown, a church member who thinks these ministries exploit the circumstances of her fellow female congregants and perpetuate negative racial stereotypes. The perspectives of these characters reflect an ongoing debate in the black community. Some believe the church is in the best position to foster healthy, happy marriages. Others believe churches are hyping up singles ministries to attract new members, but have yet to see these organizations produce remarkable results for men or women.

Our goal in producing this report on singles ministries is to offer our viewers a side of the black marriage story that the mainstream media hasn't covered in depth, and to examine the benefits and limitations of these organizations.

<p>Start <FadeIn> on "I'm living the..."</p> <p>Cut on Single</p> <p>VO</p> <p>ABC NEWS</p> <p>CNN</p> <p><i>SOMETHING NEW</i></p> <p>VO</p> <p>Archive: Inaugural Ball 2009</p> <p>CHURCH</p>	<p>WE'VE ALL SEEN THE STORY...</p> <p>IT'S ON THE NEWS</p> <p><i>The black girl curse.</i></p> <p>IT'S IN BOOKS.</p> <p><i>Is marriage for white people?</i></p> <p>IT'S EVEN IN THE MOVIES...</p> <p>We're the 42 percent...42 percent of black women never get married.</p> <p>SINGLE.... BLACK.. EDUCATED WOMEN.</p> <p>THE WORLD WON'T LET US FORGET ABOUT OUR RINGLESS... FINGER...</p> <p>AND WE'RE LEFT WONDERING WHEN THE BIG DAY WILL... FINALLY COME.</p> <p>...<AT LAST></p> <p>BARACK AND MICHELLE. THEY SYMBOLIZE BLACK LOVE IN A CITY WHERE THERE SEEMS TO BE NONE.</p> <p>WASHINGTON, DC--ONLY 17 PERCENT OF AFRICAN AMERICANS HERE ARE MARRIED.</p> <p>NATIONWIDE BLACK WOMEN ARE TWICE AS LIKELY AS WHITE WOMEN</p>
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<p>RODNEY GARRETT</p>	<p>TO NEVER MARRY BY 45.</p> <p>IT'S A PROBLEM. A POTENTIAL SAVIOR- THE CHURCH.</p>
<p>VO</p>	<p><i>Rodney: The demographics of the church now - 80% of the people who join are single, and probably 70% of them are women.</i></p> <p>RODNEY GARRETT IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE SINGLES MINISTRY AT ALFRED STREET BAPTIST CHURCH. HE RUNS A SUPPORT GROUPD FOR THOSE LIVING THE "SINGLE LIFE."</p>
<p>Fade to black</p>	<p><i>Rodney: I just basically tell people up front. I tell them this isn't a matchmaking service//We're here to put you in a room with like-minded Christians and if something happens, something happens."</i></p> <p>ON SUNDAY MORNINGS, ALFRED STREET LENDS ITS HAND TO TRADITION.</p>
<p>End up inside the party</p>	<p>BUT ON SATURDAY NIGHT...THE CHURCH EXTENDS THAT HAND TO SINGLES IN A MORE... CONTEMPORARY WAY.</p> <p>THE PARTY IS JUMPING. THERE'S NO COVER CHARGE, NO ALCOHOL. THE ONLY REQUIREMENT: BE SINGLE.</p>
<p>MONIQUE WILLIAMS</p>	<p><i>Monique: [08;42;00-synced tl] i call it navigate the system."</i></p>

<p>VO</p>	<p>MONIQUE WILLIAMS IS A 29-YEAR-OLD BUDGET ANALYST AT THE WHITE HOUSE AND FORMER REDSKINS CHEERLEADER.</p> <p>WHEN SHE'S NOT BUSY WITH WORK...SHE NAVIGATES THE SYSTEM WITH THE HELP OF THE CHURCH.</p>
<p>MONIQUE WILLIAMS</p>	<p><i>Monique: "In a way, I like the church as a way to almost vet people that i am interested in dating."</i></p>
<p>VO</p>	<p>ACCORDING TO A POLL BY THE <u>WASHINGTON POST</u>, BLACK WOMEN AND MEN ARE THE MOST RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE U.S.</p> <p>SO FINDING SOMEONE THROUGH THE CHURCH MAKES SENSE.</p>
<p>RODNEY GARRETT</p>	<p><i>RODNEY: "You spot it instantly.// They're energetic and they're talking and you see the numbers exchanging.</i></p> <p>FOUR YEARS AGO RODNEY HELPED REVITALIZE THE SINGLES MINISTRY.</p> <p><i>RODNEY: "The demographics of the singles ministry back when it was first started it was single and single again. So that ministry was predominantly 40+.</i></p> <p>AND NOW...</p> <p><i>Rodney: The dynamics of the church are a lot of younger women. The majority of people are in their 30s that are joining"</i></p>

<p>RODNEY GARRETT</p>	<p>R: <i>I am starting to get a lot emails from other people with singles ministries and they're inviting us to their events. I think they're watching the other churches, how productive it is within those churches, how successful it is. I am starting to get a lot emails from other people with singles ministries and they're inviting us to their events.</i></p> <p>BUT NOT ALL OF ALFRED STREET SINGLES ARE BUYING INTO THE HYPE.</p>
<p>BRITTINI BROWN</p>	<p><i>[27;17] I don't really want to be labeled as the "single, black women" because I there's sometimes a stigma associated with it.</i></p> <p>BRITTINI BROWN IS A 27-YEAR-OLD PROGRAM ANALYST.</p> <p><i>[32;20] L: But aren't you that?</i></p> <p><i>[35;22] B: I am, but I'm not a single, black angry woman; a single, black crazy woman; a single, black woman who is very actively pursuing a relationship, who is overzealous about it. [50;10]</i></p>
<p>RESTAURANT</p> <p>VO</p>	<p><SOUND LETTING US KNOW WE'RE IN A RESTARURANT...3 SECONDS></p> <p>ONCE A MONTH...BRITTINI JOINS HER SINGLE, ENGAGED, AND MARRIED FRIENDS FOR DINNER.</p>
	<p>Friend: <i>[1:09:09] "i went to a few events, but singles ministry just isn't</i></p>

<p>BRITTINI BROWN</p> <p>VO</p> <p>PARTY</p>	<p><i>my thing. [1:14;15]</i></p> <p><i>BRITTINI: [50;10] "I have.....guy friends and I have literally heard them say, "Oh yeah, I heard about ya'lls Sinlges Ministry. I need to go check that out cuz ya'll have a lot of nice looking women. Which is O.K. Great, but I don't want to be preyed on."</i></p> <p>BACK AT THE SINGLES PARTY. NONE OF BRITTINI'S RESERVATIONS SEEM TO MATTER. IT WAS LESS SINGLES FUN AND MORE JUST FUN.</p> <p>IN BETWEEN PLAYING CARDS...</p> <p>DANCING TO MICHAEL JACKSON...I HAD TO JOIN IN ON THIS</p> <p>...AND LISTENING TO SINGERS AND YELLERS KARAOKE IT OUT...</p> <p>Video of karaoke</p> <p>I ROUNDED UP TWO MEN WHO LEFT ALL OF THE ACTION TO CHAT WITH ME.</p> <p>BL: <i>"I'll give you the fifth degree."</i> <i>[10:04]: WHY ARE YOU GUYS...YA'LL HANDSOME GUYS. WHY ARE YOU SINGLE?</i></p> <p><i>[15:20] MEMBER 1: WE HAVEN'T MET. SOMETIMES WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG LADY LIKE YOU TO SIT NEXT TO US, TALK TO US, GET TO KNOW THE REAL MORRIS. THE REAL</i></p>
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<p>VO</p> <p>RODNEY GARRETT</p> <p>VO</p>	<p><i>ME.</i></p> <p><i>[1:11; 14]MEMBER 2: Before you even try to talk to them, they've already written you off. No matter where you approach them...they always think it's the wrong place because they watch these movies. Read these books that are fictional.</i></p> <p><i>They feel like they're romance...their prince charming...some twilight dude.</i></p> <p>EVEN RODNEY CHIMED.</p> <p><i>Rodney: If you meet a woman at the church, then her instincts are going to go up faster than if you met a woman at the club or ...You're too eligible.</i></p> <p>SO I HAD TO ASK THE QUESTION.</p> <p><i>BL: Why are you single?</i></p> <p><i>And that's what. That's the problem. Women ask me that. And it's easy to be like, "hey, come over. I'll cook for you. That's almost a curse cuz once you do that, as soon as the woman comes into my house. 15 minutes later, she's asking for a blanket and she's getting comfortable.</i></p> <p>FOR THEM...THE PROBLEM ISN'T THE THE WOMEN. IT'S THE PRESSURE.</p> <p>[More women than men singing have you seen her]</p> <p>Karaoke of "Have you seen her?"</p> <p>WHILE SOME MAY FIND THE CHURCH'S DEALINGS IN LOVE ODD, MONIQUE BELIEVES THE CHURCH IS JUST</p>
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<p>MONIQUE WILLIAMS</p>	<p>SUPPORTING ITS MEMBERS.</p> <p>Monique: <i>I think definitely if the church wants to stay relevant, they have to have a singles ministry.</i></p> <p><i>You're always told if you want to find a good woman, go to church...all the beautiful women...go to church 18;36;22 So I don't think it's something different from what we've been doing...I think now, this is just kind of formalizes it a little more...provides a little more structure.</i></p> <p>Monique: <i>You know, the church is suppose to be there to meet where people are, and people are single.</i></p>
<p>VO</p> <p>BRITTINI BROWN</p>	<p>THE STATISTICS DON'T PHASE BRITTANI. AND BEING SINGLE IN DC ISN'T AS ODD AS THE NUMBERS SUGGEST.</p> <p><i>Britt: DC is a hub of young people who are trying to get to the top of wherever they want to go. DC is a place where people climb to the top, and if you meet somebody great, if you don't meet somebody, you'll meet them later.</i></p> <p>IN THE MEANTIME, SHE'S BYPASSING THE MINISTRY AND GOING STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE.</p> <p><i>Britt: I pray for it every night, so I can tell you very specifically. I Pray that he's a god-fearing man who knows the definition of loving his wife.... I'm from the South, so I pray every day for a man who</i></p>

can fix things. My father fixes things and I love it. I pray for a man who understands the value of family.... and I pray for man who can make me better.

(COVER WITH BLACK FAMILIES)

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By Mitzi Mock and Byrhonda Lyons

Source List

Featured Interviews:

Rodney Garrett, Singles Ministry Director, Alfred Street Baptist Church

Monique Williams, Singles ministry member and congregant, Alfred Street Baptist Church

Brittini Brown, congregant, Alfred Street Baptist Church

News Coverage (Articles/TV):

Harris, Hamil R. "Churches encourage singles to develop healthy romantic relationships. Washington Post," February 11, 2012.

Cooper, Deborah. "Black churches blamed for the high numbers of single Black women in the U.S. Examiner. com," June 16, 2010.

Davis, Linsey. "Why are there so many black single females?" ABC Nightline. December 22, 2009.

Studies:

Pew Research Center. *A religious portrait of African Americans*. January 30, 2009

Yale Center for Research on Inequalities and the Life Course. *Marriage, Family on the Decline for Highly Educated Black Women*. August 8, 2009

U.S. Census. *2011 American Community Survey*.

Books:

Banks, Ralph Richard. 2011. *Is Marriage for White People?* Dutton Adult

Additional Background Interviews:

Crutcher, Brian, D.C. director of National Christian Singles Seminar; Singles Ministry Director, Georgia Ave. Church of Christ.

Mitchell, Alisha, Singles ministry member, Georgia Ave. Church of Christ.