

# More Black women consider 'dating out'

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) - For years, Toinetta Jones played the dating game by her mom's strict rule. "Mom always told me, 'Don't you ever bring a White man home,'" recalled Jones, echoing an edict issued by many Southern, Black mothers.

But at 37, the Alexandria divorcee has shifted to dating "anyone who asks me out," regardless of race.

"I don't sit around dreaming about the perfect Black man I'm going to marry," Jones said.

Black women around the country also are reconsidering deep-seated reservations toward interracial relationships, reservations rooted in America's history of slavery and segregation.

They're taking cues from their favorite stars — from actress Shar Jackson to tennis pro Venus Williams — as well as support blogs, how-to books and interracial-themed novels telling them it's OK to "date out."

It comes as statistics suggest American Black women are among the least likely to marry.

"I'm not saying that White men are the answer to all our problems," Jones said. "I'm just saying that they offer a different solution."

She reflects many Black women frustrated as the field of marriageable Black men narrows: They're nearly seven times more likely to be incarcerated than White men



Interracial dating was a movie topic for Sanaa Lathan, but it's real life for Black women.

and more than twice as likely to be unemployed.

Census data showed 117,000 Black wife-White husband couples in 2006, up from 95,000 in 2000.

There were just 26,000 such couples in 1960, before a Supreme Court ruling banished laws against mixed marriages.

Black female-White male romance has become a hot topic in Black-g geared magazines and on websites, even hitting the big screen in movies like last year's "Something New."

That film centers on an affluent Black woman who falls for her White landscaper, a situation not unlikely as Black women scale the corporate ladder, said Evia Moore, whose interracial

marriage blog draws 1,000 visitors a day.

It features articles like "Could Mr. Right Be White?" and pictures of couples like White chef Wolfgang Puck and his new Ethiopian wife.

"Black women are refusing to comply with that message about just find yourself a good blue-collar man with a job, or just find a Black man," Moore said.

She pointed to low rates of Black men in college, a place where women of all races often meet their spouses.

Black women on campus largely are surrounded by non-Black men: In 2004, 26.5 percent of Black males ages 18 to 24 were enrolled in college versus 36.5 percent

of Black women that age, according to the American Council on Education's most recent statistics.

Even after college, Roslyn Holcomb struggled to meet professional Black men.

"I wanted to get married (and) have children," she said. "If I was only meeting one guy a year, or every few years, that wasn't going to happen."

The Alabama author eventually married White.

"I think a lot of Black women are realizing or feeling that the pickings are slim," she said.

They're made even slimmer, grumble many Black women, by high rates of successful Black men choosing blondes. For some, they argue, White wives are the ultimate

status symbol.

"They don't want a dark chocolate sister laying around their swimming pool," Moore said.

Nearly three quarters of the 403,000 Black-White couples in 2006 involved Black husbands.

Meanwhile, psychological barriers have discouraged Black women from crossing racial lines.

"Black women are socialized to stick by their men," explained Kellina Craig-Henderson, a Howard University psychology professor who studied 15 Black women dating interracial.

She said modern Black women agonize over breaking male-female bonds forged in slavery and strengthened through the Jim Crow era.

"It may be even more of an issue for educated Black women who have a sense of the historical realities of this country, where Black women often were abused at the hands of White men," Craig-Henderson said.

Jones remembered being troubled when a White man politely approached her around 1990. Her stance softened years later, after a sobering party experience.

"All the Black men literally pushed (us) out the way to talk to the blondes," said Jones, who soon declared, "I'm going to date whoever."

Black men and women have openly feuded before.

At places like Atlanta's Spelman College, Black women have rallied against Black male rappers charac-

terizing them as promiscuous.

But Black men are voicing their own frustrations with women they feel regard them with suspicion. "They treat us all the same," said W. Randy Short, a Washington writer who dates across races. "The rapist on the TV is the same as me."

It's a frustration director Tim Alexander tackles in "Diary of a Tired Black Man," a frank film covering everything from Black women's demeanors to their weight. Frustrated by Black women, the main character dates a White one.

"To a certain degree, Black people are sick of each other," Alexander said. "It would be better for Black men and Black women to open their options."

But Ayo Handy-Kendi, creator of Black Love Day, argues Blacks are simply reacting to messages linking success with "whiteness." She referred to a string of successful athletes with White partners, including golfer Tiger Woods.

"They normally rejected their culture and they went to the acceptable standard of success — a White woman," said Handy-Kendi, who thought it ironic high-achieving Black women were mimicking the behavior.

Back in Virginia, Jones feels life is too short to ponder race when it comes to love. As for mom, Jones figures, "she really admires the fact that I did something she may have really wanted to do, and never did."

## Religion

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evangelists and a trend that has seen a steady migration of Christian conservatives into the GOP fold, particularly in the South.

"When the South changed, it brought the evangelicals with it," Kohut said.

The links between religion and governance intensified with the presidency of George W. Bush, said Joan Konner, former dean of the Columbia Journalism School. "He brought it up when he ran for office and he said his favorite philosopher, in answer to a question in a debate, was Jesus.

"And then he followed up on that by faith-based public funding and various other actions that started to erode what Americans took for granted as the separation between church and state," said Konner, who has studied the interaction between religion and politics and is the author

of "The Atheist's Bible."

George W. Romney was a politically moderate former governor of Michigan and auto-industry executive when he sought the 1968 GOP presidential nomination. Scant mention was made of his Mormonism in news accounts at the time and it appeared to be a non-issue in the race.

Polls showed him as the front-runner until he stumbled by complaining to an interviewer that when he had visited Vietnam, he had been "brainwashed" by military briefers there into supporting the war. That remark generated enough controversy to cost him the nomination.

Some historians suggest more attention might have been paid to Romney's Mormonism if he hadn't torpedoed his own candidacy so early. And in those days, many Christian conservatives were southern Demo-

crats and less interested in GOP primary contests.

Romney withdrew as a presidential candidate on Feb. 28, 1968, just ahead of the March 12 New Hampshire primary won decisively by Republican Richard Nixon.

Mitt Romney supporters point to Kennedy, who overcame questions about his religion to become the first Catholic elected president. He did that, in part, by speaking before Protestant clergymen in Houston in 1960 to dispel fears that, as a Catholic president, he would be subject to direction from the pope.

Can Romney neutralize the religion issue the same way Kennedy did — by giving a major speech explaining the role his Mormon faith plays in his political life?

In an interview in Iowa with The Associated Press, Romney said he's considering dealing with the issue in

a comprehensive manner, although "it's probably too early for something like that. At some point it's more likely than not, but we'll see how things develop," Romney said.

Kennedy had one advantage that Romney doesn't. When he ran, Catholics made up roughly 28 percent of the U.S. population. Although one of the fastest growing faiths in the world, Mormons represent less than 2 percent of the U.S. population with 5.5 million members across the country.

"The differences between Kennedy and Romney are in the nose count," said political historian Stephen Hess.

"The religion issue may have hurt Kennedy, but it sure helped him at the same time" as Catholics threw their support behind him.

"There is no way that capturing the Mormon vote is going to win Romney anything," Hess said.



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