

## KNOW YOUR PLACE, WOMAN: BET'S MEET THE FAITH ON BLACK MARRIAGE

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[Warning: Long post. You might want to grab a snack...]

BET has been dead to me for a while now.

I would have to say I stopped watching BET in high school. With the occasional channel flick to check out music videos, nothing on BET interested me. Not 106 and Park, not BET Nightly News. Nothing.

So imagine my surprise when my best friend called me up and told me to turn on BET, like ASAP.

“They are talking about the state of black marriage!” she yelled, then hung up the phone.

I flipped over to the channel, fearing the worst.

On BET’s Meet the Faith, host [Dr. Ian Smith](#) hosted an honest and forthcoming discussion about marriage in the African-American community.

From the tone of the panel to the how the subject matter was covered, it is obvious that we have a long way to go.

The show was set up with two short segments - one black woman’s testimony about marrying outside of the race and an attorney’s venture into blind dating, along with BET personality Cheming interviewing people on the street about their thoughts and feelings about marriage.

The main event, however, was the panel discussion. Ian Smith hosted the discussion, and the featured guests were Dr. Tiy-E Muhammed (billed as an Author and Relationship Expert), Lauren Lake (a legal analyst) and Thomas Lopez-Pierre, Owner of the Harlem Club.

Automatically, I am put on edge. What kind of conversation happens in a 2-on-1 setting? One would at least imagine you would put an equal number of guests when discussing matters of gender.

Some key quotes from the discussion (and a little bit of my reactions) are as follows:

*“Black men don’t want a partner, they want wives.” — Lopez-Pierre*

It should be noted that Lake jumped all over him for making this assertion. Lopez-Pierre went on to argue that a partner indicates an equal. While I could not catch everything he said (which is why I can't quote this part), he stated that having an equal or a partner basically means he has to respect the time of his partner, which would mean he would need to do things to help out like make dinner, or clean the house, which is something he refuses to do. Ergo, he wants a wife - not a partner. Lopez-Pierre talks about his relationship with his wife as an example. It is interesting to see where he draws the distinction - a partner is someone you have to pay attention to, a wife is a person who accommodates her man. This perspective is revisited later in the broadcast.

*"Every man in his soul wants to be with one woman, one you can trust." — Muhammad*

Muhammad says this, but later alludes to issues women have, like dating outside of their race or not being able to take care of men the way they "should" be taken care of. Every man wants to be with one woman - eventually, and that woman has to be the epitome of femininity and blackness.

The conversation zigzags a bit at this point, which leads to Lake referencing slavery, and its historical ties to forging strong women who were forced to step up to the plate. While I do agree with her assessment, the comment makes me wince a bit - it reminds me of the split-personalities black women experience within our selves. On one hand, there is the strong black woman archetype - she needs no man because she can do everything herself. On the other hand, there is that need to prove that a black woman still *is* a woman - hence Lake's assertion that she takes care of her man. She repeatedly references doing things "for her man" - but isn't it taxing to be expected to do everything?

*"A lot of black women today are putting career before family." — Tiy-E Muhammad*

Again, it is the black women's fault for the dismal state of marriage. This harkens back to the gender roles discussion. Lopez-Pierre also gave his two cents, saying that while he wants his wife to work outside the home, it should be obvious where her priorities lie.

*"You can find women who are hot, intelligent - but have the wrong attitude." — Unknown*

I did not catch the commenter who said this quote, but it was either Muhammad or Lopez-Pierre (most likely the latter.) Again, the focus comes back to black women having the wrong attitude about marriage - but what is the right attitude? To be willing to lay aside everything you worked for in order to have a functional relationship?

Lopez-Pierre again takes another opportunity to drive home his opinion that women need to focus more on being wives and supporting their husbands. Apparently, that will enable women to catch a good man. (Interestingly enough, none of these men mention the need to be financially independent as one of the triggers of modern feminism was women being abandoned by the husbands they devoted themselves to, becoming destitute and dealing with the double blow of emotional pain and financial stress.)

*"We spend more time planning our wedding than we do on our lives." –Muhammad*

Muhammad makes an excellent point here, explaining how priorities are often skewed when entering a marriage. People are often caught up in the moment, and fail to have the important discussions about things that ultimately impact the marriage - each partner's expectation in housekeeping, financial contributions, childrearing, and the roles to be adopted in the household.

*"If I cheat on my wife, it is not a reason for her to divorce me...if a wife cheats on her husband, she would be a whore." –Pierre-Lopez*

WTF, man.

The conversation continued to be very woman-focused. The panelists eventually delved into the "black woman marrying outside their race" issues. The overwhelming encouragement - from both the panelists and the BET conclusion - is that women should be patient.

Muhammad seriously questioned if dating outside the race is a realistic option.

Again, WTF, man.

Obviously, it is an option and has been an option as long as humans have found ways to mingle with each other. It was absurd to me to see a relationship expert act like dating outside of your ethnic group was a strange and new trend.

BET also aired a short segment around this part of the discussion, covering the testimony of a black woman who found love with a white man. While the woman encouraged black women to open their horizons, Muhammad seemed to be dead against the idea.

The idea of interracial dating/marriage double standards was also brought up for discussion. Apparently, the panel believes that men are judged more harshly than women for dalliances outside of their race. I disagree - while men may be on the receiving ends of snap judgments, women also feel the wrath of men when they chose to date outside their race. And if you are dating outside of your race, and the guy happens to be white...you might as well wear a tee-shirt with "race traitor" branded on you. Men will be quick to dismiss you as "the girl who dates white boys." The judgments work both ways, panelists.

Providing commentary which doubles for comedic relief, Pierre-Lopez states:

*"The problem for black women is so bad, we should be grateful that white men are willing to date them."*

He continues with:

*"My problem with white men is that they take our best women - let them take some of these women from the projects, the ones with three and four kids!"*

An interesting side track that ensued with Muhammad and Lake accusing Pierre-Lopez of being classist.

Muhammad spins the discussion into why he believes black women should not date interracial. He says when he sees a black woman in an interracial relationship, he wonders how thorough her search actually was. He says when he sees a black woman in an interracial relationship, he wants to say "Sister, come home."

Lake fires back: "You say black women come on home; we've been saying black men show up!"

Excellent point. As Lake and Muhammad prepare to argue, Pierre-Lopez chimes in:

"At the end of the day, white people are racist, so this [interracial dating] is a non issue." He cites census figures to back up his assertion, pointing out how the percentage of black men marrying white women is ridiculously higher than white men marrying black women.

A new question was ventured: Is it ok for black women to have children without a husband?

Both men had the same response: Unacceptable. The idea of selfishness was argued, with the men advocating it was selfish to bring a child into this world without a father, and Lake asking how a planned situation (which is shunned) differed from an unplanned situation of abandonment (which is seen as women doing what they have to do.)

*"We are the lions, we are the lion kings. Black men are the lion kings and we need to roar..."*  
—Muhammad

I have no idea why this quote was in this section. I just remember Muhammad said it, presumably to make a point, and I believe the point got a little lost. Maybe someone else can clarify the context.

*"You aren't doing the work to protect us...like we need you to."*  
- Lake

Again, Lake advocates for black women, but still ends up reinforcing the role that black women want to be submissive - to the right man. By indicating we need protection, she implies that black women really cannot make it on their own - they need their strong black savior.

The argument again gets heated around the single parenting issues.

*"What is selfish about a woman who is capable sharing her love with a child?"* — Lake

Ian Smith gets agitated as the debate heats up - he was raised by a single parent and gets extremely defensive with Muhammad and Pierre-Lopez's implications that single mothers cannot raise good children.

*"Sometimes a woman is in a situation where a woman has to do what a woman has to do."*

- Ian Smith

The panel then touches on dating outside your tax bracket (with another heaping serving of gender roles) before closing.

BET also introduced a celebrity testimony, featuring Courtney B. Vance and Angela Bassett. After co-authoring the book [Friends: A Love Story](#), Vance and Bassett sat down with Ian Smith to discuss married life.

Did anyone else notice how Vance - who is happily married - holds the exact opposite ideas about marriage than his predecessors on the panel. Check out these quotes:

*"When I put her first, things started to work out." - Vance*

The book dedication from Vance to Bassett reads something to the effect of: Thank you for loving me when I did not deserve to be loved.

*"It's about being a servant leader...I want to keep a smile on her face." - Vance*

I also found it interesting to hear their take on religion. While many male chauvinists root their beliefs in a male dominated relationship in the scripture, Bassett explains that in their relationship, "[Spirituality] is a key part of our lives." In light of Vance's "servant-leader" comments earlier, it is interesting to see how these things are interpreted differently.

The closing segment wrapped up the program with sending a successful attorney on a blind date with two different men.

This is when I remembered I was watching BET. WTF at the overly gratuitous booty shot to Mims' "This is Why I'm Hot?" Once again, BET has reduced a woman to her butt cheeks. Thanks.

After having one disastrous date, the second date went well until Gregory trotted out her "List" - she listed seven different necessary qualities a man must have, and probably had more, but stopped due to the expression on her dates face. There was no follow-up information given about the dates.

BET closes the program by saying: there are still a few good dateable brothers out there, so keep the faith.

So in sum:

- Black women need to wait for the right black man to come along.
- Black women need to stop being so modern, and know their gender roles
- Black men are beneficiaries of supply and demand – so black women better act like they know!
- Something New was a total work of fiction – you need to wait for your good black man.

So just how prevalent is this kind of thinking? Check out Bol's recent [post](#) on Michelle Obama (yeah, I know, I linked to Wendi. The disdain here runs deep... ):

If Michelle Obama really wants to show how strong she is, she'll learn how to do what it takes to make herself more palatable to the American people, who Barack will be counting on to elect him to office. If that means learning how to shut the fuck up and act like a woman every once in a while, then so be it.

If you think Crawford is bad, check out the posts in the comments section for this post, and other post having to do with women in the past. He has more than a few followers that share his vision of masculinity.

To end, the BET discussion of black marriage ended up a casualty of the gender wars which take place between black males and black females. As usual, neither side emerges victorious.