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Interracial marriages in US hit new high: 1 in 12

By Hope Yen
WASHINGTON (AP) - The number of interracial marriages in the U.S. has climbed to 4.8 million, a record 1 in 12 couples, as a steady flow of Asian and Hispanic immigrants expands the pool of prospective spouses. Blacks also are now substantially more likely than before to marry whites.

A Pew Research Center study, released Feb. 16, details a diversifying America where interracial unions and the mixed-race children they produce are challenging typical notions of race. "The rise in interracial marriage indicates that race relations have improved over the past quarter century," said Daniel Lichter, a sociology professor at Cornell University. "Mixed-race children have blurred America's color line. They often interact with others on either side of the racial divide and frequently serve as brokers between friends and family members of different racial backgrounds," he said. "But America still has a long way to go."

The figures come from previous censuses as well as the 2008-2010 American Community Survey, which surveys 3 million households annually. The figures for "white" refer to those whites who are not of Hispanic ethnicity. For purposes of defining interracial marriages, Hispanic is counted as a race by many in the demographic field.

The study finds that 8.4 percent of all current U.S. marriages are interracial, up from 3.2 percent in 1980. While Hispanics and Asians remained the most likely, as in previous decades, to marry someone of a different race, the biggest jump in share since 2008 occurred among blacks, who historically have been the most segregated.

States in the West, where Asian and Hispanic immigrants are more numerous, including Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico and California, were among the most likely to have couples who "marry out" - more than 1 in 5. The West was followed by the South, Northeast and Midwest. By state, mostly white Vermont had the lowest rate of intermarriage, at 4 percent.

In all, more than 15 percent of new marriages in 2010 were interracial.

The numbers also coincide with Pew survey data showing greater public acceptance of mixed marriage, coming nearly half a century after the Supreme Court in 1967 barred race-based restrictions on marriage. (The 45th anniversary of the decision will be June 12. In 2000, Alabama became the last state to lift its unenforceable ban on interracial marriages.) About 83 percent of Americans say it is "all right for blacks and whites to date each other," up from 48 percent in 1987. As a whole, about 63 percent of those surveyed say it "would be fine" if a family member were to marry outside their race.

Minorities, young adults, the higher educated and those living in Western or Northeastern states were more likely to say mixed marriages are a change for the better for society. The figure was 61 percent for 18- to 29-year-olds, for instance, compared to 28 percent for those 65 and older.

Due to increasing numbers of interracial marriages, multiracial Americans are a small but fast-growing demographic group, comprising about 9 million, or 8 percent of the minority population. Together with blacks, Hispanics and Asians, the Census Bureau estimates they

(Continued On Page 2)



A float with figures depicting French soccer player Zinedine Zidane and U.S. President Barack Obama parades during the 128th edition of the Nice Carnival, Saturday, Feb. 18, 2012, in Nice, southern France. This year the carnival is celebrating the theme "King of Sport." (AP Photo/ Lionel Cironneau)

6 of 10 on ethics panel quit Waters case

By Larry Margasak
WASHINGTON (AP) - All five Republicans on the House ethics committee and the panel's ranking Democrat withdrew from a long-standing investigation of Democratic Rep. Maxine Waters of California on Feb. 17 to avoid further questions about their impartiality.

The extraordinary development came more than two years after the panel began examining whether Waters tried to steer money from the 2008 financial bailout to a minority-owned bank while her husband was a shareholder and board member of the institution.

The mass recusal came in one of the committee's most troubled cases, after past allegations of bias by Republican members forced the panel to hire an outside lawyer last July to investigate the committee and its handling of the Waters case.

The committee's Republican chairman, Rep. Jo Bonner of Alabama, said the outside attorney, Billy Martin, requested the recusals. But Bonner said the recusals "are not based on any indication of any wrongdoing or inappropriate partisanship by the members."

Waters, a high-ranking member of the Financial Services Committee, was accused by the panel of trying to use her influence to obtain federal aid for a minority-owned bank where her husband is an investor.

During an investigation that has gone on for more than two years, Waters, one of the longest-serving African-American lawmakers, has consistently denied wrongdoing, saying her efforts were focused on helping a number of minority-owned banks that were in financial trouble.

In addition to the five Republicans on the committee, its senior Democrat, Rep. Linda Sanchez of California, also withdrew from the case - even though she was not a committee member when the allegations of bias surfaced. In fact, all five of the Democrats on the committee in 2010 quit the panel when Congress convened in January last year, saying new members were needed to take a fresh look at the Waters case. However, all five Republicans decided to stay on.

The five Republicans stepping down were Bonner and Reps. Michael McCaul of Texas, K. Michael Conaway of Texas, Charles Dent of Pennsylvania and Gregg Harper of Mississippi. Replacements have already been named to allow the Waters case to continue.

The chairman said Martin advised the committee that, to date: -He has not discovered any evidence to indicate bias or partiality in the investigation.

-He has not discovered evidence that should cause a mandatory removal of anyone from the case.

-There is no conflict that would require disqualification of any current member or staff of the committee.

The six members, Bonner said, "believe that, out of an abundance of caution and to avoid even an appearance of unfairness, their voluntary recusal will eliminate the possibility of questions being raised as to the partiality or bias of committee members considering this

(Continued On Page 2)

'Loving Story' shows unlikely civil rights heroes

By Jesse Washington
(AP) - Richard Loving looks out from the Jim Crow past with wary eyes, appearing on the screen with a blond crew cut, plaid work shirt, bad teeth and Southern accent.

"He looked like a redneck," said Philip Hirschkop, a lawyer who soon recognized his mistake - Loving was actually a pioneer for racial equality.

The white bricklayer from Virginia defied stereotypes and centuries of racist laws when he married Mildred Jeter, who was black and Native American. Convicted of violating a law against interracial marriage, the Lovings fought for their rights and won a landmark 1967 Supreme Court case that struck down such bans nationwide.

Their lives are explored in a new documentary, "The Loving Story," which premiered on HBO. Today, there are more than 4 million "mixed marriages" in the United States, and roughly one in seven new marriages are between people of different ethnicities. But in 1958, when the Lovings' marriage was ruled illegal and they were banished from their native Virginia, 21 states outlawed interracial unions.

"The Loving Story" details the couple's nine-year battle to live in Virginia as man and wife. Using evocative photographs, newly unearthed footage and interviews with the Lovings' daughter and lawyers, the film reveals the power of love to overcome bigotry.

"I came to respect Mildred and Richard so much," said the film's director and producer, Peggy Buirski. "I think these people had such high standards and strong principles and in many ways they defied stereotypes."

"You don't have to be an activist to change history," Buirski said. "You just have to believe strongly in something."

Richard and Mildred grew up near each other in rural Virginia. They courted for a few years before getting married in Washington, D.C., on June 2, 1958, then returned home to live near their families.

On July 14, the sheriff broke into the Lovings' bedroom in the middle of the night and took them to jail. Judge Leon Bazile sentenced the Lovings to five years in prison, but suspended the sentence as long as they left the state. And Bazile made a statement that demonstrates the immense distance society has traveled since 1958, a statement that is narrated at the start of the film:

"Almighty God created the races: white, black, yellow, Malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents, and but for the interference with His arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages," Bazile said in court. "The fact that He separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mate."

But "The Loving Story" makes clear that Mildred and Richard Loving were meant for each other. Numerous still photographs, taken for Life magazine by Grey Villet, capture the intimate glances and gestures shared by soul mates. Archival film depicts mundane moments of daily life - a sock smoothed over a foot; a log tossed into the stove - that become pregnant with meaning when a family is under attack.

Mildred, who died in 2008, does most of the talking, her gentle voice describing the ordeal she endured with her husband and three children. Richard, who was killed by a drunken driver in 1975, says little beyond, "I'm not gon' divorce her."

The Lovings moved to Washington to be together, but Mildred was not suited for city life. A friend told her to write to the U.S. attorney general, Robert F. Kennedy, who advised her to contact the American Civil Liberties Union.

Hirschkop and Bernard Cohen were the ACLU lawyers who took the case to the Supreme Court. Their opponents argued that interracial marriages - and the children they produced - were much more likely to have difficulties. They compared Virginia's law banning such marriages to those prohibiting polygamy or incest.

In 1967, the Supreme Court ruled 9-0 in the Lovings' favor.

Buirski noted that even though most Americans now say they have no problems with interracial marriage, pockets of resistance have remained.

Laws prohibiting interracial marriage stayed on the books in South Carolina and Alabama until 1998 and 2000, respectively. In 2009, a Louisiana justice of the peace refused to marry a black man and a white woman. "I'm not a racist," said the official, Keith Bardwell. "I just don't believe in mixing the races that way."

In a 2011 Gallup poll, 84 percent of whites and 96 percent of blacks said they approved of interracial marriage.

"It's not something we can take for granted," Buirski said.

"Racial identity is an important conversation to have in our culture, and I think the more we bring it to the forefront of our conversation, the better it is for everybody. That's one reason I don't see this story as history. I see this as living history."