

Increase in Interracial Marriages in US

And, we visit an event for companies seeking to sell services and products to same-sex couples | As It Is

Hello, and welcome to *As It Is* from VOA Learning English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today we report on the growing number of marriages between two people of different racial groups.

"Society has become more accepting of it -- although we still get looks sometimes."

And we go to an event designed for same-sex partners who plan to get married.

"I think it's great that now we have this opportunity and it's great to see so many vendors here who support the community."

Interracial and same-sex marriage: those are the subjects of today's program as we help you learn to read, speak, write and understand everyday American English.

Listen carefully, and before you know it, you will have improved your American English by listening to *As It Is* here on VOA.

Number of Interracial Marriages in US Increases

In 1959, only four percent of Americans supported the idea of interracial marriage -- that is, a marriage between people of different races. Today, the United States has its first biracial president. The father of President Barack Obama was from Kenya. His mother -- a white American -- was from the state of Kansas.

One recent study found that 87 percent of Americans approve of interracial marriage. That information comes from the research company Gallup, Incorporated.

In New York City, the number of people who approve of interracial marriage may be even higher than 87 percent. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, a white man, is married to Chirlane McCray, an African-American woman. They are the parents of two biracial children.

But interracial couples were not always welcome in the country. In 1958, a Virginia couple, Mildred and Richard Loving, were arrested for violating a state law banning interracial marriage.

“I saw this light, you know, and I woke up, and it was the policeman standing beside the bed. And he told us to get up -- that we was under arrest.”

That was Mildred Loving. She and her husband fought their arrest in court. And in 1967, the United States Supreme Court ruled that interracial marriage bans were unconstitutional. Since then, the number of such marriages has slowly increased. The U.S. government says 15 percent of all new marriages are now between individuals of different races.

“Society has become more accepting of it -- although we still get looks sometimes.”

That was Gerri Buchanan. She and her husband, Tom Rogers, have been married for five years. Both of them have children from earlier interracial marriages.

They are one of a growing number of multiracial families in New York City. Political observers say New Yorkers liked the fact that Bill de Blasio is part of a mixed family. They say the family is partly responsible for his strong victory in local elections last November.

Ken Tanabe created a celebration of interracial families called Loving Day. It is named for Mildred and Richard Loving. Mr. Tanabe says Mr. de Blasio's election shows New York City is changing.

"It's always been a diverse place, but there are more and more couples that are interracial, and more and more people that identify as multi-ethnic, and with the election of Bill de Blasio, you know, I think we're seeing more and more acceptance and support for those families and couples and individuals."

Writer Aja Monet says the mayor's marriage is helping change the image of African-American women in popular culture and politics.

"You know, if you don't look a certain way, if you're not Eurocentric in your, your figure, or in your identity -- I mean look how many times have people tear, tore down Michelle Obama

based off of her body, and based off of how she, she looks, and this is from white men a lot of the time. And so here you have this other man who's like 'Let me kiss my beautiful black wife in, in front of you, and I love her,' and it's not about that."

Some people say Mayor de Blasio, his wife and children represent a new America. They say it is one where the fastest-growing group under age 18 is children of mixed race.

A Wedding Show for Same-Sex Couples

Same-sex marriage is now legal in at least 18 American states and the District of Columbia. The federal government also recognizes same-sex marriages. That is good news for gay and lesbian couples, who are now busy making plans to get married. It is also good news for the photographers, hotels, restaurants and other businesses that are happy to help them celebrate the big day. Expositions targeting this new market are becoming more popular.

One example was the recent Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Wedding Expo in Baltimore, Maryland. More than 30

businesses sent representatives to the event to market products like dresses, wine and wedding cakes.

Michael Sofield and Jamie Barnes came from New Jersey, where same-sex marriage is legal. But Mr. Sofield says they plan to get married in Maryland in May.

“I think it’s great that now we have this opportunity and it’s great to see so many vendors here who support the community.”

Marianne Puechl and her same-sex partner began organizing these expositions in 2003. That was before same-sex marriage was legal anywhere in the country. She says it can be difficult for gays and lesbians to attend wedding expos targeting heterosexual couples. She says some businesses may not approve of same-sex marriages. But that never happened at her shows.

“They’re just immediately understood to be the brides or the grooms and they go from there and they launch directly into the joy and the excitement of planning their day.”

Cristina Dimperio of Maryland plans to get married next year. She likes going to an event where she is accepted.

"It's definitely a good thing. We've been trying to do this for a long time and now that we can actually do it, it feels great."

Her mother, Catia Dimperio, is happy for Cristina and her girlfriend of six years.

"She's 26 and we're all ready for her to get married."

Visitors to the wedding expo could see beautiful clothing and jewelry, and a model who wore them.

Betsy Robinson owns a bridal store. She says she has been selling an increasing number of wedding dresses to lesbian brides.

"It used to be that, I found it interesting that even if they were shopping with the mother, the mom wouldn't say 'My daughter is marrying another woman,' whereas today that's very, very common."

Joseph Smith and his husband own a wedding invitation business. He says a lot of businesses are not sure how to work with the gay and lesbian community.

“Because we’re part of it, people feel more comfortable working with us.”

Marianne Puechl says the wedding expos that have the largest crowds are in states where same-sex marriage is not yet permitted. She says that even in those states, many couples have ceremonies to celebrate their love.

And that’s our program for today.

I’m Christopher Cruise reporting from VOA Learning English headquarters in Washington.

Jim Tedder will be here tomorrow with another edition of *As It Is*. I hope you’ll join him then, here on The Voice of America.



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