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Cornel West to speak at COSI April 16 for ‘Race’ exhibit

By CHRIS BOURNEA

Staff Writer

Professor and cultural commentator Cornel West will appear at COSI Columbus, 333 W. Broad St., on Wednesday, April 16, to speak on the topic “Race: The Untold Truth.” West’s appearance is part of COSI’s current exhibit “Race: Are We So Different?,” on view through May 6.

The “Race” exhibit explores similarities and differences among people. Interactive features, historical artifacts, iconic objects, photographs, multimedia presentations and graphics displays depict the various aspects of race. West will speak about race from a historical, cultural and biological perspective.

The “Race” exhibit coincides with the release of a recent study from The Ohio State University that finds interracial marriage is becoming more common.

Published in the “Journal of Marriage and Family,” the study found that interracial marriages in the United States have been increasing since the 1980s. Marriages between African Americans and Whites increased rapidly between 1980 and 2008, outpacing the rate of unions between Whites and other ethnic and racial groups.

In 1980, only 5 percent of Black men married a white woman, but that increased to 14 percent in 2008. Still, by comparison, 38 percent of Asian American men and Hispanic men married a White woman in 2008.

“The number of marriages between Whites and African Americans is undeniably increasing, but it is still a small number,” said Zhenchao Qian, an Ohio State sociology professor and lead author of the study.

Overall, marriages between Blacks and Whites showed large increases between 1980 and 2008. One factor contributing to the increase in interracial marriages may be that more people

are encountering one another in college and other educational settings, Qian said.

“Education seems to be a big factor,” he said. “When you go to college, there is a lot of integration. You see people of different races. That could develop into the potential for interracial contact and interracial romance.”

Qian and his fellow researchers used Census data from the past three decades to analyze marriage rates between different racial groups.

“This allowed us to look at marriages that were formed in the previous year,” Quian said.

The researchers mostly focused on first marriages, rather than remarriages that happen after divorces, and found that younger people tend to be more open to interracial relationships.

“Because we looked at first marriages, they’re typically younger,” Qian said. “The younger you are, the more likely you are to be in an interracial marriage.”

The study found that it’s still more common for African-American men to marry outside of their race than African-American women.

“About three quarters of interracial marriages among Blacks and Whites involve Black men and White women,” Qian said. “About 25 or 26 percent involve Black women and White men.”

There are a number of sociological theories about why people marry outside of their race. In the past three decades, education has become an increasingly significant factor.

“Education has played a bigger role now than in the past,” he said. “It used to be that race trumped everything. Highly educated Whites and Blacks are more likely to marry than in the

past. And now education plays a role in breaking down the racial barrier.”

For more information about West’s appearance and the “Race” exhibit, visit Cosi.org.