

OPINION

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It was Simple: They Loved Each Other

It's way past time to disarm hate

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



Sunday, June 12, America woke up to news of the worst mass shooting in our gun-soaked history. A celebration of Latin Night at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando turned into a killing field fueled by intolerance, hate and weapons of war. Now is the time to remember those who stand up and stand together in love.

In 1963, young wife and mother Mrs. Mildred Loving decided to write a letter to U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy about a "problem" her family was facing. Four years later Mrs. Loving, who was black, and her husband Richard, who was white, made history when their struggle to have their marriage recognized in their native Virginia led to the landmark 1967 Supreme Court ruling in *Loving v. Virginia* overturning the remaining laws in Virginia and other states that banned interracial marriage.

The couple, who shunned the spotlight, made it clear they never set out to be social revolutionaries. It was simple: they loved each other, wanted to marry, and beyond that, as Mrs. Loving said, "It was God's work."

The two first met in the early

1950s when she was 11 and he was 17 in Central Point, Va., the small community where they both grew up. They became young sweethearts, and in 1958, when Mildred became pregnant, they decided to get married. They drove to Washington, D.C., for their marriage license, and Mrs. Loving later said she initially thought they were doing that because less paperwork was required there. But Richard already understood something she didn't: Getting a marriage license as a mixed-race couple would have been illegal and impossible in Virginia.

Mr. Loving may not have known how the state would treat legal interracial marriages that had been performed elsewhere, but five weeks after their wedding the newlyweds received a very literal rude awakening: Acting on a "tip," sheriff's deputies surrounded their bed with flashlights at two in the morning demanding to know why they were there together. Their reply that they were husband and wife made no difference. The Lovings were arrested, and Mr. Loving was held in jail overnight while the pregnant Mrs. Loving was forced to stay for several days.

Both were charged with cohabitation and violating Virginia's Racial Integrity Act. Under a plea bargain, in order to avoid a year-long jail sentence they were

forced to leave the state and were prohibited from returning together for 25 years.

The Lovings settled in Washington, D.C., and began raising a family there but quickly missed the small town where they had spent their entire lives. Five years later, inspired by the March on Washington and the wave of new civil rights laws, Mrs. Loving decided to write to U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy to ask if any of the new legislation would allow them to return to Virginia, even just to visit. He responded and suggested the Lovings contact the ACLU, where over the next few years dedicated lawyers helped take it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. On June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court justices ruled 9-0 that Virginia's law and all others like it were unconstitutional, and that the freedom to marry was "a basic civil right."

Mr. and Mrs. Loving soon returned to their hometown with their three children. Sadly their own happiness ended in tragedy in 1975 when Mr. Loving was killed and Mrs. Loving lost the sight in one eye in a car accident caused by a drunk driver. But the Lovings had paved the way for thousands of other couples like themselves who were marrying the people they loved. Thanks to God's work and the Lovings' love, my husband Peter and I were the very first interracial couple to be married in

Virginia after the U.S. Supreme Court decision.

Mrs. Loving never remarried and lived quietly at her home in rural Caroline County, Virginia until she passed away in 2008. But a year before her death, the widow, grandmother, and great-grandmother sent another groundbreaking letter. This time, it was a public statement submitted just before the Massachusetts Legislature's historic vote reaffirming marriage equality, and read aloud at a 40th anniversary celebration of the *Loving v. Virginia* decision:

"When my late husband, Richard, and I got married in Washington, DC in 1958, it wasn't to make a political statement or start a fight. We were in love, and we wanted to be married . . . My generation was bitterly divided over something that should have been so clear and right. The majority believed that what the judge said, that it was God's plan to keep people apart, and that government should discriminate against people in love. But I have lived long enough now to see big changes. The older generation's fears and prejudices have given way, and today's young people realize that if someone loves someone they have a right to marry.

"Surrounded as I am now by wonderful children and grandchildren, not a day goes by that I don't think of Richard and our love, our right to marry, and how much it

meant to me to have that freedom to marry the person precious to me, even if others thought he was the 'wrong kind of person' for me to marry. I believe all Americans, no matter their race, no matter their sex, no matter their sexual orientation, should have that same freedom to marry. Government has no business imposing some people's religious beliefs over others. Especially if it denies people's civil rights.

"I am still not a political person, but I am proud that Richard's and my name is on a court case that can help reinforce the love, the commitment, the fairness, and the family that so many people, black or white, young or old, gay or straight seek in life. I support the freedom to marry for all. That's what Loving, and loving, are all about."

In a heartbreaking moment of terroristic hatred fueled by a larger sea of vitriolic and divisive rhetoric, racial and ethnic intolerance, pervasive hate crimes, prejudice, and discrimination against gay people, and guns, guns, guns we let remain the only unregulated consumer product despite their massive lethality, it is critical to listen again to Mrs. Loving's words. We cannot be consumed by bigotry and violence. It's way past time to disarm hate.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.

Public Figures Who Leak Stupidity from Their Lips

Rape is rape, nothing else is

BY LAURA FINLEY



Let me begin with a simple declarative. Nothing, I repeat, nothing, is like being raped. Rape is a horrific invasion of the most sacred thing we have, our bodies. So, it infuriates me to hear celebrities and politicians minimize rape by equating their life experiences to being violently victimized, or by using their powerful public platform to blame victims.

In the latest in public figures who leak stupidity from their lips, Indian actor Salman Khan attempted to equate filming a difficult scene with being a victim of rape, professing that afterwards he "couldn't walk." Kanye West once compared the paparazzi following him and his family to being raped. Likewise, Charlize Theron, who has been a

Stop Rape advocate for the UN, commented that having her privacy violated was tantamount to rape. Johnny Depp compared having to participate in photo shoots with fans to being raped, while Kristen Stewart likened fame in general to enduring sexual assault. And of course, there's Donald Trump's comment that China has been allowed to "rape our country."

My least favorite comedian Daniel Tosh (unless you count the multiple rapist Bill Cosby as one still), when called out by a female audience member for saying rape jokes are always funny, doubled-down to state "Wouldn't it be funny if that girl got raped by, like, five guys right now? Like right now?"

Speaking of Cosby, Damon Ways attempted to defend the man from rape allegations by pronouncing some of the accusers as "unrapeable." Then, of course, there's Congressman Todd Akin, with the infamously moronic comment re-

garding rape and abortion: "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try and shut that whole thing down." Not to be outdone, former North Carolina Republican Rep. Henry Aldridge stated that when women are "truly" raped (note the heavy implication that women falsely claim they are sexually assaulted) "the juices don't flow, the body functions don't work and they don't get pregnant." Ron Paul similarly called it "honest rape."

Clearly none of these fools has read even a bit of literature on rape, or they'd know that false reports of rape are quite infrequent and occur no more often than do false reports of other crimes.

More rape myth spewage: In 1988, basketball coach Bobby Knight compared the stress of a game to rape, exclaiming "I think that if rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it." Just two years later, former Texas gubernatorial candidate Clayton Williams echoed that asi-

nine tidbit. Many celebrities have also made jokes implying that drugging someone then having sex with them is completely acceptable. Such comments have come from a diverse array of celebrities, including Miley Cyrus, The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug actor Martin Freeman, and Al Franken. Far from funny and definitely not clever, these remarks are definitely not going to help young men and women navigate sexual relationships.

Victim-blaming is a common trope as well. Whoopi Goldberg, Chrissie Hynde, Serena Williams, musician Cee Lo Green all sadly, and likely scores more, have blamed women's clothing, drinking, or other so-called "inappropriate" behavior for their victimization.

Commenting about Rihanna, Daily Mail columnist Liz Jones wrote that the artist had a "fashion sense on stage that surely invites rape at worst, disrespect at least."

When actor Shia LaBeouf said he had been raped years prior, pundit Piers Morgan thought he needed to weigh in, calling it, with no proof at all, "a load of baloney" and insisting that it insults other victims. Hmm. How about they get to decide if they're insulted? And when did he become the rape truth-teller?

It pains me to review the frequency of these comments, some even issued by people I would generally have respected. While some did apologize afterwards, many used that insincere "I didn't mean to offend anyone" garbage. Surely it can't be that hard to avoid equating any minor life annoyance with being sexually assaulted. And time has more than come for people everywhere to withhold their personal diatribes about a victim's personal appearance or behavior. Please. Enough, already.

Laura Finley, Ph.D., teaches in the Barry University Department of Sociology & Criminology and is syndicated by PeaceVoice.