

Following Where Love Led Them

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found the legal strategy, to be sure. But a new film that bears the couple's name, "Loving," quietly demonstrates that Mildred and Richard Loving derived the necessary clarity simply from loving one another, and from following where that love led them. Focusing less on the legal drama and more on how these two unassuming young people experienced their decade-long-struggle for the right to live as a couple in their home state, director Jeff Nichols tenderly shows us what their love looked like. The attacks against it seem so outrageous now -- yet withstanding those attacks required commitment far more unswerving than rhetoric can muster. Plainly, love was the ingredient most essential to necessary transformation and social change.

In 1958, 16 states still carried anti-miscegenation laws, and a Gallup poll indicated that 94 percent of white Americans still disapproved of interracial marriage. (Oregon finally repealed its

law against interracial marriage in 1951, but was hardly progressive; Oregon did not ratify the Fifteenth and Fourteenth Amendments until 1959 and 1973, respectively.) Undertaking marriage was, for the Lovings, a radical act, though there is little sign that they approached it with that sort of awareness. She was 19, he 25, and they both grew up in a poor, rural community where some amount of mixing apparently was happening underground. They did not mean to challenge anyone -- but their quiet reach for legitimacy clearly was an affront to what were ironically experienced as values in the broader culture.

Nichols' film took its inspiration from an excellent 2011 HBO documentary, "The Loving Story" -- worth watching as a companion to the feature film. Neither film contains any speeches or theorizing; the Lovings are themselves the best way in to the story.

Nichols nicely depicts how the culture of white supremacy is reinforced -- with directives to and from the white community, but

with punishments doled out disproportionately to people of color. When the couple is arrested in their bedroom in the middle of the night, Richard is asked what he is doing with Mildred, who answers that she is his wife. Both are taken to jail, but Richard is not allowed to bail out pregnant Mildred after his sister quickly posts his bail. Mildred instead spends several additional days in jail, alone and frightened.

Richard's mother likes Mildred well enough, but doesn't defend the marriage; in her mind, Richard is to blame for the couple's troubles because he "knew better." One senses that, had Richard just taken Mildred, as his privilege would have allowed, and kept the relationship out of sight, nothing might have happened -- and indeed, a black character suggests after their convictions that Richard can solve his problems by simply divorcing Mildred, even if he wishes to continue cohabiting with her.

Taciturn Richard's loyalty to and love for Mildred is conveyed

not with verbal explanation, but with his steady focus on providing for her and with the ease of their physical connection. The couple finds acceptance mainly in the black community, where Richard moves about with facility. Richard clearly fits the mold of the Southern white man, as unlikely a hero as one could imagine; Australian actor Joel Edgerton captures his resolve and his clarity, even as he hangs back in interactions with lawyers and the press. He avoids public appearances and the courtroom, but instructs his lawyer to "Tell the judge I love my wife."

While Richard focuses on keeping the family safe and providing for them, quiet Mildred is the clear driver of the legal struggle. She carries in her bones two of the most oppressed cultures in American history, yet watches the events of the Civil Rights Movement on her television set as she raises her three young children. What drives her, finally, is homesickness; Ruth Negga, a revelation as Mildred, conveys the resignation and longing that builds in her during the years the couple spend in Washington, D.C., far from their rural

home. Mildred finally wrote to Attorney General Robert Kennedy seeking assistance in 1963. He referred her to the ACLU, and two young men new to legal practice handled the case. At several points, it is obvious that Richard would not have pursued this route, and Mildred must gently persuade him. It is she who dares to hope, as well; after their loss in the state appellate court, she tells the press that she feels hope: "We may lose the small battles, but win the big war."

Then it's back to ironing, and wrangling her children. We need stories like these, and director Nichols has found the right way to tell this one. As depicted here, just as in the documentary, Mildred and Richard show us the way forward; they know who they are, and they keep moving onward, living their truth, and loving.

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CALENDAR November 2016

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
14 <i>William Steig born, 1907</i> National Clean Out Your Refrigerator Day	15 America Recycles Day Pack Your Mom Lunch Day	16 <i>Jean Fritz born, 1915</i> <i>Fall of the Inca Empire (1533)</i> Button Day	17 Homemade Bread Day Take A Hike Day	18 <i>Antarctica discovered in 1820</i> William Tell Day	19 <i>Gettysburg Address, 1863 by President Lincoln</i> <i>Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1917</i>	20 Mexican Revolution Day <i>Traffic Light Patented in 1923</i>
 21 <i>Leo Politi born in 1908</i> <i>Mayflower Compact Signed in 1620</i> World Hello Day	22 Stop the Violence Day <i>John F. Kennedy Assassinated in 1963 (35th President)</i>	23 National Cashew Day	24 Thanksgiving Day <i>Charles Darwin publishes 'The Origin of Species' in 1859</i>	25 Black Friday <i>Crescent Dragonwagon born in 1952</i>	26 <i>Charles Schulz born in 1922</i>	27 Pins and Needles Day <i>Astronomer Anders Celsius born, 1701</i>
 28 <i>Tomi Ungerer born, 1931</i> <i>Magellan reached the Pacific (1521)</i>	 29 <i>Madeline L'Engle born, 1918</i> <i>King Tut's Tomb Opened (1922)</i>	30 <i>Mark Twain born, 1835</i> Stay At Home Well Day				