

### They fought the law, and love won

Adapted from a movie review by **Manohla Dargis**

- 1 There are few movies that speak to America as movingly – and with as much idealism – as Jeff Nichols’s *Loving*, which revisits the period when blacks and whites were so profoundly segregated in this country that they couldn’t always wed. It’s a fictionalization of the story of Mildred and Richard Loving, a married couple who were arrested in 1958 because he was white, she was not.



- 2 The movie opens in the late 1950s, when Mildred and Richard are young, in love and unmarried. If their story didn’t open when and where it does, there would be nothing remarkable about Mildred and Richard. But this is Virginia, a state that banned interracial unions, partly to prevent what it called “spurious issue,” or what most people just call children. So when Mildred and Richard decide to marry, they exchange vows in a neighboring state. Not long after, the local sheriff and his deputies – prowling like thieves – enter the couple’s home in the middle of the night and arrest them for breaking the state’s marriage law.
- 3 Mr Nichols captures the era persuasively. He wraps Mildred and Richard in a deep-country quiet. There’s beauty in this silence, as when Mildred closes her eyes as the wind stirs the trees. There’s also fear, because while Richard’s stillness may be a matter of temperament, his darting, haunted eyes also suggest defeat. The movie about the couple’s decade-long legal fight to live in their home state as husband and wife is wrenchingly personal and moving.
- 4 Movies get a lot of mileage from the fantasy that we are the heroes of our own stories. Life’s regular hum – the effort and joy of making homes, having children and nourishing love – tends to be drowned out by speeches and dramas in which characters rob banks to get out of debt instead of struggling or despairing. It’s why the insistent quiet of *Loving* can feel so startling. It plucks two figures from history and imagines them as they once were, when they were people instead of monuments to American exceptionalism. It was, the movie insists, the absolute ordinariness of their love that defined them, and that made the fight for it into an epic story of this country.

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