

“Loving”

Richard Loving (Joel Edgerton) is an affable construction worker, happiest when working on cars, going to drag races and drinking beer with his black buddies. But the best part of his life is his black girlfriend Mildred. (Ruth Negga) When she tells him she is pregnant he is thrilled and proposes on the spot. But this is Virginia circa 1958 where marriage between blacks and whites was a felony. The supposed basis for the law was to prevent mixed race children, something that evidently did not bother antebellum slave owners who regularly “had their way” with their female slaves. So Richard and Mildred have to go to Washington D.C to get married. When they return home their decade long ordeal begins.

In a harrowing nighttime raid they are arrested and taken to jail. Once in court they are given the choice of either prison time or pleading guilty with a suspended sentence, in which case they will have to leave the state and not return for 25 years. Given that unpalatable choice they reluctantly plead guilty, say goodbye to friends and family and head back to Washington.

Years later, with three young children, Mildred cannot face another day in the city and at her insistence they go back to the Virginia countryside where they try to keep a low profile. But Mildred knows that it is just a matter of time before they are discovered and she sends a letter to Attorney General Robert Kennedy which sets in motion the events which will challenge the law which makes their marriage a crime. In order to get the legal ball rolling, however, they have to face re-arrest to lay the foundation for a federal appeal. Prison may be in the offing and there is the constant fear of being “visited” by white supremacists. But they forge ahead and the result is the 1967 Supreme Courts’ decision in “Loving vs. Virginia” striking down Virginia’s anti-miscegenation statute.

This is a quiet and understated film which never goes for the “big moment” and is a showcase for two memorable performances. As Richard, Edgerton has perfectly captured the essence of a taciturn hard working family man who is supremely uncomfortable in the spotlight and cannot always find the words to express what he is feeling. Negga, (in a breakout performance which earned her a slew of awards and nominations) is a shy and self-effacing young mother but with a spine of steel who refuses to bow to injustice. She is a shining presence on the

screen. Together she and Edgerton have created an indelible portrait of a devoted couple who are poster children for all that is good in marriage. “Loving” is an apt name for this pair of legal pioneers.

(Amazon Prime)