

# Loving v. Virginia, the court case that made interracial marriage legal

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Mildred Loving and her husband, Richard P. Loving, are shown in this January 26, 1965, photograph. Mildred Loving's challenge to Virginia's ban on interracial marriage led to a landmark Supreme Court ruling. Photo by AP.

In 1957, Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter broke Virginia law by getting married. He was a white man and she was a black woman. Their marriage was illegal under Virginia state law.

The Lovings took their case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The high court ruled that the Virginia law was against the U.S. Constitution. States could not prevent black people and white people from marrying, the Supreme Court justices said. Loving v. Virginia was the name of their court case. Many say it helped the movement to end Jim Crow laws in the south. These were laws that separated blacks and whites, or segregated them.

## Miscegenation

Throughout U.S. history most states did not let blacks and whites marry each other. Only nine states never made a law against interracial marriage.

There were attempts to fight these laws, but they generally did not succeed.

By the 1950s, more than half the states still had laws stopping marriage between whites and blacks. In Virginia, people who broke the law could be sent to jail.

### **Richard And Mildred Loving**

Richard Loving was a white construction worker, and Mildred Jeter was African-American and Native American. They were old friends who both lived in Central Point, Virginia, and fell in love. In June 1958, they got married in Washington, D.C., where it was legal. Then returned home to Virginia.

About five weeks later, the Lovings were woken up at about 2:00 a.m. and arrested.

The couple pleaded guilty the following year. A judge convicted them and sentenced them to one year in prison. However, he said they did not have to go to jail if they left Virginia and did not return together for 25 years.

The Lovings moved to Washington, D.C., and had three children. Still, they longed to return to their hometown.

In 1963, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) agreed to help them. The ACLU is a major civil rights group that challenged many segregation laws in court.

### **The Loving V. Virginia Supreme Court Case**

Later that year, the Lovings asked a judge to overturn their conviction and sentence.

In 1967, the United States Supreme Court heard the case. A lawyer for Virginia defended his state's law. The ACLU lawyers argued the Virginia law was against the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The amendment guarantees all citizens due process and equal protection under the law. This means that government must treat people fairly and cannot discriminate.

One of the ACLU lawyers was Philip Hirschkop. He stated that the Virginia law was racist. "These are not health and welfare laws," he argued. "These are slavery laws, pure and simple."

The Supreme Court announced its ruling on June 12, 1967, and its decision was unanimous. Under the Constitution, individuals can decide who they want to marry and live with, wrote Earl Warren. He was the chief justice of the Supreme Court. States must let black people and white people get married.

The decision ended laws against interracial marriage in 16 states, including Virginia.

### **Legacy Of Loving V. Virginia**

The Lovings had lived secretly on a Virginia farm during their legal battle. After the Supreme Court decision, they returned to Central Point to raise their children.

Richard Loving was killed in 1975 in a car crash. Mildred Loving spent the rest of her life in Central Point and died in 2008.

Loving v. Virginia is considered one of the most important legal decisions of the civil rights time period. Across the country, states could not prevent blacks and whites from getting married.

Still, some states were slow to change their laws. The last state was Alabama, which officially allowed interracial marriage in 2000.

In 2015, the Supreme Court made gay marriage legal across the U.S. In its decision, the justices brought up *Loving v. Virginia*. They said the case showed that marriage is a human right.

June 12 is “Loving Day.” The holiday marks the anniversary of the *Loving v. Virginia* decision and celebrates multiracial families.

## Quiz

1 Read the selection from the section "The Loving V. Virginia Supreme Court Case."

*The amendment guarantees all citizens due process and equal protection under the law. This means that government must treat people fairly and cannot discriminate.*

What is the meaning of the word "guarantees" as it is used in the selection above?

- (A) neglects
- (B) promises
- (C) opposes
- (D) encourages

2 The term "interracial marriage" is essential to understanding this article.

Which sentence from the article BEST helps the reader understand the meaning of "interracial marriage"?

- (A) These were laws that separated blacks and whites, or segregated them.
- (B) The ACLU is a major civil rights group that challenged many segregation laws in court.
- (C) States must let black people and white people get married.
- (D) They said the case showed that marriage is a human right.

3 What effect did Virginia state law have on Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter?

- (A) It made them choose to move to Washington, D.C., where their marriage was legal.
- (B) It forced them to decide between leaving their home in Virginia or going to prison.
- (C) It caused them to consider whether they should stay married.
- (D) It helped them understand why there were laws about race.

4 According to the section "The Loving V. Virginia Supreme Court Case," how do laws against interracial marriage go against the U.S. Constitution?

- (A) The laws were not made to favor white people.
- (B) The laws applied only to people who lived in certain states.
- (C) The laws were not based on people's welfare.
- (D) The laws discriminated against people.