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Loving Vs. Virginia: A Documentary Novel Of The Landmark Civil Rights Case



Synopsis

From acclaimed author Patricia Hruby Powell comes the story of a landmark civil rights case, told in spare and gorgeous verse. In 1955, in Caroline County, Virginia, amidst segregation and prejudice, injustice and cruelty, two teenagers fell in love. Their life together broke the law, but their determination would change it. Richard and Mildred Loving were at the heart of a Supreme Court case that legalized marriage between races, and a story of the devoted couple who faced discrimination, fought it, and won.

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Customer Reviews

Gr 8 Up—•This title, depicting the individuals and events surrounding a watershed moment in U.S. civil rights history, is immediately relevant today. In 1950s Virginia, Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter fell in love and wanted to marry and raise their family where they were brought up. This was a problem: Loving was white, Jeter was considered "colored," and there was a law prohibiting interracial marriage. Still, the couple married in DC anyway, and after returning to Virginia, they served jail time. After years of separation and fighting the ruling, they connected with ACLU lawyers, and in 1967 their case was heard by the Supreme Court, which unanimously overturned the previous judgment against the Lovings in a landmark ruling. Written in free verse, this docu-novel alternates perspectives between Richard and Mildred. News clippings, maps, and archival photos add immediacy and context, as do Strickland's moving illustrations, in the style of "visual journalism," which she explains in an appended note. The volume also features a time line of relevant events and an appended summary of the Lovings' lives after the case. The bibliography

displays the author's extensive research, which included interviews with those who were connected to the couple, and the free-verse style personalizes the historical events, which reach directly into today's headlines. No single book can tell the whole story, of course, and this offers a rich opportunity for students and adults to discuss urgent and perennial questions: In any retelling of history, what has been left out? Is every story an open subject for every author? VERDICT A natural addition to any school or public library. With the new film *Loving* and the upcoming 50th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court case, there will be increased attention on the Lovings' story. — Kristin Anderson, Bloomingdale Public Library, IL

"Excellent starter book for those interested in learning the basics of the civil rights movement."—*Publishers Weekly* "Powerful and riveting."—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review "Offers insights into the couple who never imagined they would make civil-rights history."—*Austin American-Statesman* "Immediately relevant today. a rich opportunity for students and adults to discuss urgent and perennial questions."—*School Library Journal* "Fine, dramatic storytelling in a memorable verse format."—*Booklist*, starred review "A challenging, poignant read about an important civil rights case."—*ForeWord Reviews* "Convincing portraits of Mildred and Richard Loving's courtship, marriage, troubles, trials and triumph."—*Charlotte Observer* "Compelling and heartrending, this true story personalizes the civil rights movement."—*Common Sense Media* "Captures the subtlety of a historic moment through the eyes of characters whom teens can relate to."—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* "An impressive level of detail, and vivid depiction of the social environment."—*The Horn Book Magazine* "A story that is personal, not just political."—*San Francisco Chronicle* "A compelling, heartbreaking but ultimately triumphant tale."—*The Cleveland Plain Dealer* "Presented through the alternating voices of Mildred and Richard Loving, the reader enters the lives of two people in a tight-knit community who fall in love and are forced to leave the world they have known. We grow up with them and understand their quiet strength. Patricia Hruby Powell sets the Loving's story within the historical context of the Civil Rights Movement thereby allowing readers to gain a greater understanding of the fight for equal rights, at both the personal and societal level."—Jennifer Kelley Reed, Teacher Librarian and blogger at Reederama "This stunning book is a must-purchase for the simple pleasure of its poetry, its genuine and moving story, and its respectful consideration of this monumental case on its 50th anniversary."—*School Library Connection* "Readers who enjoy history, art, love stories, and the fight for equal rights will enjoy this biographical fiction. The timing of the book is perfect."—*VOYA: Voice of Youth Advocates* "This handsome oversized volume... tells a quiet yet powerful story."—*Baltimore Sun* "Tells a quiet yet powerful story."—*The Chicago*

Tribune"Spellbinding free verse, illustrations, photos and more, it's a must for teens and adults alike."--Brit+Co."Skillful storytelling mixed with the occasional illustration and documents transports readers into Mildred and Richard Love's lives in this must-read, exceptional book based on their true story."-Imagination Soup

This is very special for me, the adoptive father of a son (his biological mother was white, his father black) who is in his mid-forties and married to a white woman. When Troy was adopted from the state of Alabama, he could not be adopted by white parents there although that law was soon found unconstitutional. Now Troy is the daddy of a little boy. This Loving case--and the way it is so beautifully rendered in this book--is going to be a Christmas gift to my son.

The actual book is great but I was disappointed to see the front right corner of the book and the book jacket worn and unraveling. This is for my classroom and it will get enough wear and tear.

I thought this documentary novel was written very well . The events were easy to follow. This was a page turner .I recommend this to book clubs and the leisure reader.

**** Trigger warning for racism and an allusion to rape. ******MILDRED** Richard once said, "It could be worse, Bean. If you was the white one and I was the colored one, people saw us together? They'd lynch me. We can do this."**RICHARD** After waiting another year more like fourteen months they lost that case. Is that four now? They called for another. Their lawyers sure are excited for losing. As its 50th anniversary approaches, the 1967 Supreme Court case *Loving vs. Virginia* is receiving some extra attention: from the recently released film starring Ruth Negga (forever my Annie Cresta!) and Joel Edgerton (titled simply *LOVING*), to a mention on the ABC sitcom *BLACKISH*, and now a "documentary novel" written by Patricia Hruby Powell, with illustrations by Shadra Strickland. For those unfamiliar with the case, *Loving vs. Virginia* struck down the state's anti-miscegenation statute (the Racial Integrity Act of 1924) and, by extension, similar statutes that existed in twenty-five other states which prohibited whites from marrying outside their race. Interestingly, no such restrictions existed for non-whites, which is part of what led to the law's downfall: The Lovings' lawyers argued that the emphasis on maintaining the racial purity of whites (but not nonwhites) presupposed the superiority of the

“white race,” in clear violation of the 14th Amendment. In *LOVING VS. VIRGINIA*, Hruby Powell tells the story of Mildred and Richard Loving’s historic fight, from the genesis of their relationship to their victory in the Supreme Court on June 12, 1967 (a day that’s now remembered as Loving Day). The couple grew up together in Central Point, Virginia; their rural neighborhood was home to people of all colors: black, white, Native American, and multiracial. (Mildred herself was light-skinned, with both African and Native American ancestry.) They socialized, shared potluck dinners, and helped each other with farm work. Despite the state’s law against it, interracial relationships were not unheard of. Millie and Richard started dating in 1955, and two years later they had their first child, Sidney Clay. When Mildred found herself pregnant for the second time, the couple decided to get married in nearby Washington, D.C. Just five weeks later, they were arrested in the dead of night. Sheriff Garnett Brooks and two deputies stormed into the couple’s bedroom in the Jeter house and demanded of Richard, “Who’s that woman you’re sleeping with?” When Mildred replied that she was his wife, Brooks shot back, “Not here, she ain’t.” While Richard was released on bail the next day, they held Mildred for a week or more. (Sources seem to vary on this.) Though she was the only woman in a cell meant for many more, the conditions were substandard, and Millie’s jailers threatened her, including with rape. After her release, the couple moved to D.C., where they stayed with Millie’s cousin Alex and his wife Laura. They returned to Virginia in January, after baby Donald was born, where they received a one-year suspended sentence as long as the couple never returned to the state together. For the next eight years, the Lovings found themselves shunted between Virginia and D.C., as they fought to return to their home and the case wound its way through the courts. A refrain you’ll often hear repeated about them is that they never set out to make history; they just wanted to go home. Told in verse, from Mildred and Richard’s alternating perspectives, *LOVING VS. VIRGINIA* is a beautiful and heartbreaking book. As with any work of historical fiction, you wonder how much is grounded in truth, and which parts are the author’s invention. According to the Acknowledgements, Hruby Powell spoke to the Lovings’ family and friends including Lewis and Otha Jeter, two of Millie’s seven brothers as well as neighbors who frequented the same hangout spots, so I think it’s safe to assume that much of the narrative is firmly grounded in reality. Though I was vaguely aware of the case, I learned a ton from *LOVING VS. VIRGINIA*,

especially about the anti-miscegenation laws (which I had assumed banned all interracial marriage). It can be all too easy to view historical events through a lens of removal or disconnect, but Hruby Powell deftly shows the impact they can have on those who live through them. Millie was very much a country girl, and her excommunication to (comparatively) dirty and crowded D.C. took a toll on her mental well-being. Meanwhile, Richard was forced to make a three hour round-trip commute to Central Point every day for work, eating up much of his time and earnings. For the better part of the decade, they lived in limbo, a state of uncertainty, anger, and hope, wishing nothing more than to be allowed back home, as a family. She humanizes Mildred and Richard so well, in fact, that I found it especially difficult to reconcile the couple's six-year age difference: when they first met, Millie was eleven, while Richard was seventeen. They began courting when Millie was sixteen, and she first became pregnant at seventeen. (Again, accounts seem to differ, but in the context of this story, she was seventeen.) The back matter describes this as a story about "two teenagers who fell in love, which is not quite right. Intellectually I get that this was more acceptable back then; but emotionally, my heart still ached for seventeen-year-old Millie, unexpectedly pregnant and with no one to turn to for help. (The neighborhood midwife just so happened to be her boyfriend's mother!) I rooted for the Lovings, of course, because racism is bulls****. But I also rooted for Millie, because every girl has the right to a quality education, as well as the ability to plan their families. The Lovings' story is peppered with contemporary information about the civil rights movement, to help put their struggle in context, to great effect. In this vein, I wish Hruby Powell had included a page about reproductive freedom. For example, it wasn't until 1965, in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, that the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional for the state to prohibit married couples from using contraception. I get that the main thrust of the book is civil rights vs. women's rights, but it feels odd to gloss over this detail, especially in a book that seems geared toward MG/YA readers. Teenage pregnancy at the expense of a high school education isn't something that has to happen nowadays, not when our access to contraception has grown in leaps and bounds. (Yet, as recent events have demonstrated, is still under attack.) Likewise, before her death in 2008, Mildred voiced her support for same-sex marriage: "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. I would have loved to have seen some mention of this in the ‘afterward,’ which is otherwise tragic as heck: just eight years after the ruling, Richard was killed by a drunk driver. (Mildred, who was also in the car, was blinded in one eye.) Finally, a note on the format: Though I usually prefer ebooks to print books, LOVING VS. VIRGINIA is the rare exception. The hardcover is a feast for the eyes, handsome and thoughtfully designed. Hruby Powell’s prose is complemented wonderfully by Strickland’s illustrations, done in the style of “visual journalism. The book also includes historic, period photographs, for example, side-by-side images of all-white and colored schoolrooms to demonstrate the bald-faced lie of “separate but equal” education. While there aren’t many photos of the Lovings (none exist from their childhood), Strickland does a masterful job bringing them to life in pen and ink. The result is a lovely and heartrending book that’s needed now more than ever. ** Full disclosure: I received a free copy of this book for review through Library Thing’s Early Reviewers program, as well as an e-ARC through NetGalley. **

"The freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men." Told in verse this book, shows the true story of Richard and Mildred Loving a mixed race couple in the 50's. Going into this book I really didn't know much about anything about this couple/case besides the fact that they went against not only the government, but how most people at the time believed things should still be. The bravery that these two had to continue to fight for what they and so many others deserved is just amazing to me and I

am so grateful for them. They had to fight for something that should have been able for anyone to do together no matter the color of their skin. As for the couple themselves though, at first I did struggle to like Richard. I felt like at times he took advantage of the age difference that he and Mildred had, that had her being slightly naive when it came to certain things. Also I didn't like that he didn't stick around to help Mildred out when consequences happened for something they both participated in. When he came back though and had changed his ways enough that made it possible for them to be a family, I started to be okay with him though. Especially when he was working in Virginia even though they were having to live in Washington, it showed me that he was dedicated to providing for his family and making it work between him and Mildred despite all of the roadblocks they had ahead of them. Mildred has to be one of the strongest people I have ever read about. Not only did she try to make the best out of what was happening around her, she also kept fighting for what she wanted despite Richard getting tired of the fight and just wanting to give up at one point. As for how accurate this novel is in comparison to what actually happened to Mildred and Richard, I honestly have no idea. But I do hope to read more about them in the future to continue to learn about this point in history. Thank you to netgalley and the publisher for an e-arc of this book in exchange for my honest review.

That art, the parallels to history, the poetry, the symbolism....magical. This book is phenomenal, and it really taught me a lot, and I am someone who considers herself to be a history buff when it comes to this time period. This book will be valuable for my students, and at the same time, so enjoyable to read. I loved the artwork and drawings, and I loved how they said things so I had to stop, think, and process, for example, "I think, that's like our life./We're those crows./The wind is casting us around--/go live here,/now you can live there,/now get on over there./You can't control the wind./ They say we're making progress." So worth the purchase and the time to read it.

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