

‘Loving’ is a gentle and sweet testament

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 123 min.

Director Jeff Nichols (*Midnight Special*, *Mud* and *Take Shelter*) has frequently taken on the fantastic in his movies. This includes kids with psychokinetic powers, criminals on the run, and persons with apocalyptic visions, all done while maintaining a low-key approach. His latest is called *Loving*, and it's a very sweet and affecting tale based around a true story. It's also a lot more traditional and straightforward in its approach than one might have expected.

This feature depicts the 1959 union of Richard (Joel Edgerton) and Mildred Loving (Ruth Negga), and their eight-year struggle to be recognized as a married couple in their home state of Virginia.

Falling in love, the pair drives to Washington D.C. to be married, but soon learn that their actions carry dire consequences with local law enforcement. Until 1967, interracial matrimony in Virginia and rest of the Southern United States was strictly forbidden. As a result, the couple is

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threatened with lengthy prison terms for their actions.

Many years later, lawyer Bernie Cohen (Nick Kroll) asks for their assistance in repealing the discriminatory law.

As mentioned, the director takes a very understated and direct approach to the material. What's occurring is horrendous — a couple of appalling actions are taken and there are some nasty, menacing officials. However, the majority of townspeople show their disdain with simple comments like, “You should know better.” One supposes that a nasty statement or two can be just as hurtful as a threat, but at times the minimalist approach minimizes some of the dramatic impact.

The lead characters are equally genial and soft-spoken, despite the injustice befalling them. As anticipated, the performances are stellar, with Edgerton effectively conveying Richard as an uncomplicated and good-natured country boy with a slow drawl.

There are many scenes of the couple just “being,” for lack of a better term — going about their business while showing affection. It's only late in the film that Richard truly begins to feel paranoid about his family's safety. These scenes are very effective and relatable, conveying the constant, day-to-day fear of reprisal and worry that one has to endure for being deemed different.

Negga has a bit more of a transformation as Mildred. At first, she is terrified by the danger she and her husband are put in and depressed about having to adjust their life plans. However, she slowly takes up a more proactive position in the fight for reformation of marriage laws and the rights of her family.

Michael Shannon appears briefly as a Life Magazine photographer snapping photos of the Loving family going about their daily routine. More unusual casting comes in the form of lawyer Bernie Cohen, played by Nick Kroll. The smirking comedian is an odd choice, and while he's decent enough in the part, his appearance takes some getting used to.

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As with the rest of the tale, there isn't a grand gesture or emotional climax. In the end, this is a quiet, deliberately paced (and occasionally even a bit slow-moving) film that opts out of using any dramatic flourishes in its storytelling. Instead, it simply presents some average, everyday people who just want to be happy together and left alone.

It may not be high drama, but *Loving* is a gentle and sweet testament to the life of a couple who endured and outlasted a state's cruel and bizarre intolerance.

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