

Mixed-race or same-gender, couples are together because of love

WOODBIDGE— In 1958, 10 years before I was born, Richard and Mildred Loving faced a year in jail. He was white, she was black, and interracial marriages were illegal in this state and remained so until 1967.

My husband and I were students at James Monroe High School in the mid-1980s. He's black, I'm white, and, when we started dating, my parents received numerous tips on how to handle my apparent "rebellion."

It was, they learned, a seemingly expected "coming of age" tradition to date those of a different race on the sly, but completely deplorable to do so openly, without pretense or apology.

In retrospect, my own high school classmates didn't seem to care whom I dated, but some members of my husband's class, the year behind mine, were blatantly nasty. Being an affirmed social cretin myself, their malice was wasted on me at the time, but their spiteful comments prepared me for the more subtle racism we encounter now.

We are not as far removed from blind prejudice and bigotry as we would like to think, and the Jan. 9 Free Lance-Star story "[Couple Feels Forced to Leave](#)" makes that painfully clear. I've heard the arguments that the current fight for gay rights can't be compared to the African-American struggle for equality. However, when the laws start focusing on the rights of couples, the similarities are undeniable.

In 1958, the Lovings left Virginia to avoid jail and to preserve their marriage. In 2005, Barbara and Tibby are planning to leave Virginia to preserve their relationship.

The Lovings did not consider themselves activists; they were a quiet couple, wanting nothing more than to be together legally. Their simple desire, which did not threaten anyone else, led to massive change. Barbara and Tibby, too, are reluctant activists. They lead a quiet, unobtrusive life—a life built on a love that threatens no one.

In truth, it's no one's business.

When I was a student at a Northern Virginia university (ironically known for its diversity), I was walking across campus with a male friend. A black friend. We weren't even touching, just walking, chatting casually about our classes. Another young man, a white student, walked past, stopped, and glared at us before muttering, "Damn shame." He presumed a lot in that glance and, unfortunately, revealed a lot about himself in his statement.

Another time, my husband and I were walking around his parents' neighborhood. It was a quiet day, and we were enjoying our walk when a car squealed by and some-one yelled, "Nigger lover!" I never saw who it was. Maybe it was someone who knew us. Fredericksburg is a small city. Maybe it was someone who didn't and simply assumed.

But, it wasn't their business.

We see two women holding hands. They might be sisters, friends, or mother and daughter or lovers. It doesn't matter. It isn't our business.

When laws step into our bedrooms and attempt to control our hearts, they've gone too far. Gay civil union, or even

gay marriage, doesn't threaten society. Bad parents do. Violent video games might. Hateful rhetoric justified by biblical distortion definitely has influence.

But a committed relationship based on love, regardless of gender, doesn't weaken the wobbly institution of marriage. (Now, divorce? Infidelity?)

Laws that are created out of fear and ignorance and bigotry hurt us. They weaken our collective spirit and heart. They legalize and legitimize hatred. Virginia is moving backward, embracing the same kind of laws that invited the sheriff into the Loving's Caroline County bedroom.

Laws based on such hatred dismiss genuine love and destroy family and have no place in a civilized society that claims to despise discrimination.

It is, I've learned, the height of arrogance to devalue someone else's love. Jesus himself said, "Judge not." My own marriage has been scrutinized, dismissed, challenged, and condemned because others forgot those teachings.

It is not my right, nor your right, nor even the General Assembly's right, to define love.

— **Missy Ridge Carter**
lives in Prince William County.