

## **Love Is Blind**

### **Miscegenation as portrayed in *The New York Times* from 1955 to 1975**

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In 1865, coupled with the end of the Civil War, came the end of slavery. This was a huge step for the rights of African Americans, however, the years that followed were arguably the worst of all time in terms of discrimination and cruelty. In order to deal with all the remaining racism still raging not only in the South, but all across America, the government set up The Freedmen's Bureau. Ideally the bureau was supposed to give the freedmen (freed slaves) their own government and a way for them to secure relative equality. However, the Bureau did not last long and officially gave way in 1872, leaving in its wake an immense amount of racism.

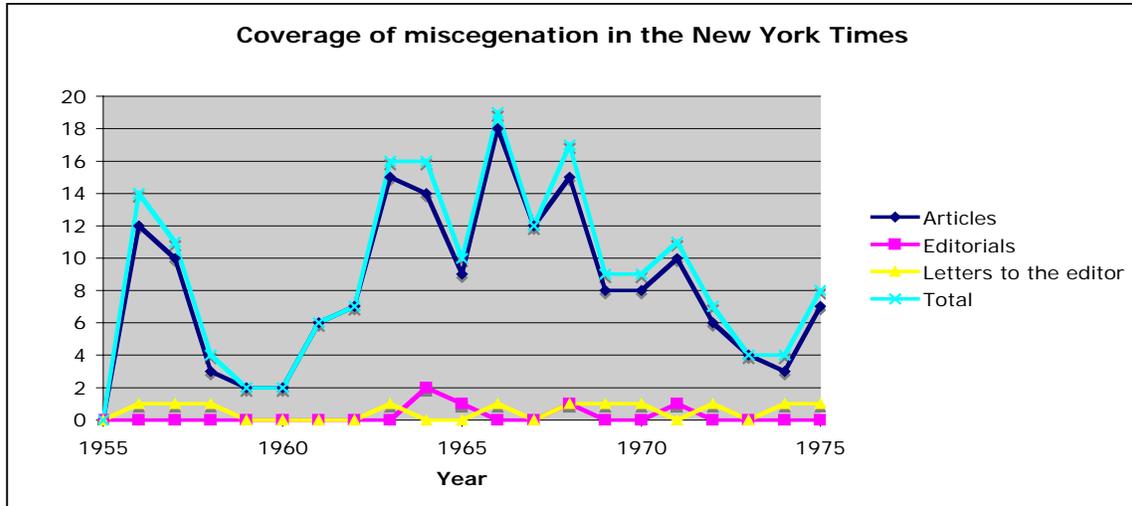
Segregation in the years that followed left the African Americans in the same, if not a worse, position than throughout the years of slavery. For many years African Americans couldn't go the same schools, sit next to each other on the buses or use the same bathrooms. Therefore, it was nearly impossible to have a friendship with someone of the opposite race, let alone a romantic relationship. Miscegenation, mixed race marriage or intercourse, specifically between blacks and whites, was never a serious concern throughout the course of slavery because slaves were considered to be on an entirely different level of humanity from their white owners; therefore a legal marriage between a slave and any white person was completely out of the question. However, as segregation progressed, African Americans, although still treated terribly, were finally starting to be viewed as people instead of property.

The civil rights movement was eventually born as a direct result of the injustices of segregation. African Americans wanted to be treated like citizens of the United States who deserved the same rights as everyone else. With this new outlook of African Americans as people came many possibilities that the general white public did not approve of, one of which was the increasingly plausible potential for miscegenation. Many anti-miscegenation laws were already implemented in the United States, simply as precautionary measures. As segregation, and the civil rights movement, progressed, more people who were willing to take the risk of an interracial marriage began to surface. As a direct result of this increase, more people who were opposed to mixed race marriage started to appear as well, and consequently the anti-miscegenation laws were finally being utilized.

Throughout the twenty-year period of the Civil Rights movement up until the striking down of the anti-miscegenation laws, the debate rose and fell with the times. As the civil rights movement began to grow in the mid 1950s, so did the coverage of the miscegenation debate. There was a large rise in articles concerning the issue, from relatively none in 1955 to double digits in the following two years. This period of increased publicity was, however, caused by the separate concern of censorship, because miscegenation was legalized in movies in 1957. This acceptance showed a broader tolerance of the general idea of miscegenation in the eyes of the American people. This spike in the early years of the Civil Rights movement was followed by half a decade of very little coverage. In 1963, there was a sudden jump in the number of articles marked by the introduction of two separate articles in which people of power, a governor and a cleric, each took a strong stance on the subject, signaling miscegenation's shift from an

occasional mention in the *Times* book review or show listings to a serious topic of debate. This number stayed relatively high through the mid 1960s when the anti-miscegenation laws were finally beginning to be repealed in high numbers. 1967 was a major turning point for supporters of mixed race marriage. The debate exploded into *The New York Times* in the time surrounding the case of Loving vs. Virginia, the major case in which Mildred and Richard Perry Loving fought for their right to get married, which resulted in the laws banning miscegenation to finally be deemed unconstitutional. The discussion surrounding miscegenation, however, did not end when the Supreme Court made its decision. Outrage from conservatives and joy from supporters continued until 1972, when the topic began a slow continuous decline in publicity, instead of an increase.

Year	Articles	Editorials	Letters to the editor	Total
1955	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
1956	12	0	1	<b>14</b>
1957	10	0	1	<b>11</b>
1958	3	0	1	<b>4</b>
1959	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
1960	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
1961	6	0	0	<b>6</b>
1962	7	0	0	<b>7</b>
1963	15	0	1	<b>16</b>
1964	14	2	0	<b>16</b>
1965	9	1	0	<b>10</b>
1966	18	0	1	<b>19</b>
1967	12	0	0	<b>12</b>
1968	15	1	1	<b>17</b>
1969	8	0	1	<b>9</b>
1970	8	0	1	<b>9</b>
1971	10	1	0	<b>11</b>
1972	6	0	1	<b>7</b>
1973	4	0	0	<b>4</b>
1974	3	0	1	<b>4</b>
1975	7	0	1	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>188</b>



In 1955, the Civil Rights movement began to gain momentum, but miscegenation was not one of the major topics for debate. As a matter of fact, in 1955 there were no articles concerning the subject in *The New York Times* at all. The number then greatly increased in 1956-1957. Although one might assume this was due to the publicity generated by the Civil Rights movement, it was because of censorship in the cinema. Prior to 1957, it was illegal to depict miscegenation in a movie.

The revisions in the code, the first since its adoption in 1930, lifted the taboos against the treatment of illicit narcotics practices, abortion, prostitution and kidnapping. The revised code spelled out the way these subjects could and could not be treated. A fifth taboo—that against miscegenation—was dropped.<sup>1</sup>

Some members of the American Civil Liberties Union believed that these changes would actually lead to more censorship because now exactly what was said and shown could be controlled, however, others believed the new revisions opened up the freedom to portray previously forbidden subjects. Either way, it shows that miscegenation, although still outlawed in practice, was beginning to be more widely accepted. If people could see and get used to the idea of mixed-race couples, even if it was only fiction, then they would

<sup>1</sup> “Liberties Group Scores Film Code.” *The New York Times*, April 24, 1957, pg.29.

eventually accept them as normal. Interestingly, sixteen of the twenty-two articles from 1955 to 1957 dealt with miscegenation in some form of media, more specifically, books, movies and theater. However, not a single one of those sixteen, or the other six, said anything good or bad about miscegenation itself. Despite the fact that it was only in fiction that miscegenation was legal, for this period of time, it was acceptable and there was essentially no debate about it.

After the code changes in 1957, the overall coverage of miscegenation dropped from the twenty-two in a two-year period, to only twenty from 1958 through 1962. The content of the coverage stayed mostly the same, reporting on books, plays, and movies (thirteen, in total). For example,

A new novel by LeGette Blythe titled “Call Down The Storm” is planned for publication next month by Holt. It is a story of miscegenation and racial integrations from the closing years of the reconstruction period to the present.<sup>2</sup>

This book announcement is a perfect example of how *The Times*, and society, would openly discuss miscegenation and make it seem like a part of everyday life. However, when they were faced with it in real life, there was a much more substantial amount of outrage in the press. Up until this point, almost all of the coverage had been simply a mention here or there of something that involved miscegenation, never reporting on miscegenation as its own topic. In fact, there had only ever been two articles that displayed a strong opinion over the previous five years. In 1959, Governor of Virginia J. Lindsay Almond fiercely opposed the state’s unwillingness to pass anti-integration laws. His main position was against integration as a whole, which consequently encompasses miscegenation.

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<sup>2</sup> “Books- Authors.” *The New York Times*, June 18, 1958, pg. 31.

Governor Almond assailed “false prophets of a ‘little or token integration’” and “those who denied or close [d] their eyes to the livid stench of sadism, sex immorality and juvenile pregnancy infesting the mixed schools of the District of Columbia and elsewhere.”<sup>34</sup>

Governor Almond was the first reported case in years in which someone openly stated his or her opinion on the topic. He, however, did not lead an enormous group of people in doing so. From the tone of his statement he assumed that Virginians would support him whole-heartedly which, at least according to *The New York Times*, was false. In fact, it wasn't until 1962 when anyone else was reported as taking any stance at all on the matter.

In 1962, a Unitarian Cleric, Rev, Farley W. Wheelwright, preached a sermon in full support of miscegenation. He had visited Albany Ga., and found immense separation between the races because, “The Negro in Albany is not concerned with marrying the whites... what he wants today is the vote.”<sup>5</sup> However, he managed to come out of the experience with a strong support for the legalization of miscegenation, as well as general rights of African Americans.

Miscegenation is both likely and desirable... eventually when schools, restaurants, hospitals and cemeteries are integrated, it is inevitable that interracial marriages will become as acceptable as interfaith marriages are today<sup>6</sup>

This article was one of the first of its kind, going against what had been the norm for the past century. These two men, with polar opposite ideas, were the first to make their

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<sup>3</sup>Bigart, Homer, “Almond to Fight for Segregation” *The New York Times*, January 21, 1959, pg. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Later on in the article, the author states “Almond was speaking tonight the language of “Southside” Virginia... where integration is held synonymous with miscegenation” --Ibid

<sup>5</sup> “Unitarian Cleric Who Visited Georgia Backs Miscegenation” *The New York Times*, September 17, 1962, pg. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

voices heard in the debate over miscegenation. Unlike Governor Almond, however, others began to follow Rev. Wheelwright.

As time progressed, in 1963, the debate over miscegenation seemed to be moving along relatively slowly. The number of articles had doubled from the previous year, but the actual relevance of those articles in terms of the debate was about the same as it had been previously. The majority of articles were still dedicated to book and movie reviews. A classic example of the type of movie review that could be found at the time is as follows.

John Ford conclusively illustrated that 47 years of moviemaking and 128 pictures could result in pleasurable professionalism, even on a very familiar theme... there is romance, of a sort, and miscegenation, and religion, but it is all done in continuous movement and with tongue constantly in cheek.<sup>7</sup>

There were many more articles of this sort during that time. They show that the general public outlook on miscegenation was not necessarily that negative, as long as it was only in fiction. The small amount of actual debate in 1963 did, however, foreshadow that in the years to come. In November of that year, President Truman publicly stated his disapproval of miscegenation.

Former president Harry S. Truman said yesterday he did not believe white persons should marry Negroes. He said that racial intermarriage ran counter to teachings of the bible. Mr. Truman, long an advocate of integration in other respects, expressed his views in an interview... He was asked whether he thought intermarriages would become widespread in the untied states. "I hope not," said Mr. Truman. "I don't believe in it."<sup>8</sup>

The fact that President Truman could support integration, but not miscegenation shows that despite previous suggestions, integration and miscegenation were not always

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<sup>7</sup> Weiler, A.H. "A Time for Film Comedy." *The New York Times*, July 28, 1963, pg. 69.

<sup>8</sup> "Truman Opposes Biracial Marriage." *The New York Times*, September 12, 1963, pg. 30.

synonymous in the eyes of the public. The more interesting aspect of this article was highlighted by an article appearing only a month later.

Although it was never stated that the Catholic Church submitted this article in response to Truman's statement, their connection is undeniable. Truman's interview was published on September 12, 1963 and on November 18 of the same year the Church published the following statement.

Interracial marriage is completely compatible with the doctrine and canon law of Roman Catholicism, a national church organization said here today. The national catholic conference for interracial justice made it unequivocally clear that, although diversity of faith, and already existing marriage bonds were impediments to marriage, race and color were not... "Races do not marry" the statement declared. "Nations do not marry. Classes do not marry. Only persons marry."<sup>9</sup>

These two opposing statements mirror the debate that was to follow them. They both used the exact same scripture to form the basis for their respective arguments, but reached completely opposite conclusions. Surprisingly, the Catholic Church (and the Unitarian cleric from 1962), in this case, was more progressive than an ex-president. People everywhere had been forming strong opinions just like Truman and the church, and through *The Times*, they finally had a vessel to make their voices heard, and thus the period of little or no coverage came to a close.

October 1964 marked the beginning of the monumental series of court cases that led to the eventual striking down of the miscegenation laws, and the immense amount of press and disputes that came with it. Richard Loving, a white man, and Mildred Jeter, a half black, half Indian woman, were married in June of 1958 in the District of Columbia in order to escape the harsh laws against interracial marriages in their home of Virginia.

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<sup>9</sup> George Dugan, "Catholics Uphold Biracial Couples." *The New York Times*, November 18, 1963, pg. 47.

They were then charged upon their return with the then-crime of miscegenation.<sup>10</sup> Then began the circus of appeals and process of fighting for their rights, and with this came an immense amount of press coverage. Therefore, it wasn't until 1964 that the press truly made the switch to covering the issue in terms of heated arguments and breaking news.

The articles were finally distributed relatively evenly between the previously more common news pertaining mostly to movies or books or strictly just the facts reporting, and the more recently common pieces displaying varied stances and strong opinions. An article was published in 1964 stating the findings of a group of scientists working for the United Nations, offering proof that interracial intercourse has no adverse effects.

It has never been established that the mixing of races has played a negative role for mankind as a whole. On the contrary, it has helped to preserve biological ties between groups of people and, consequently, the unity of mankind in its diversity. Hence there is no biological justification for banning interracial marriages nor for any advice aimed at banning them.<sup>11</sup>

Here, the scientific community officially came out and said in no uncertain terms that miscegenation is biologically sound, and that there are no scientific reasons why it should be banned. The scientific population made its official statement, similarly to what the Catholic Church did the previous year, when they declared that miscegenation does not go against what is stated in the Bible. Also, the fact that this group of scientists was made up of delegates for the United Nations gives some insight to the general global outlook on the issue. At the very least, it shows the UN's attitude about miscegenation, because it is safe to assume that if the UN did not support what was said, they would not widely

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<sup>10</sup> "Excerpts From Supreme Court's Ruling on Virginia's Ban on Miscegenation" *The New York Times*, June 13 1967, pg. 29.

<sup>11</sup> "All Races Equal, Scientists Assert: Panel Sees No Biological Basis to Bar Inter-marriage." *The New York Times*, August 21, 1964, pg. 20.

publicize these findings. Leading up to the Supreme Court's final ruling in 1967, there were many articles such as this one, as well as those opposing interracial marriage, although the oppositions were less common in *The New York Times*.

Throughout the court case of Richard and Mildred Loving there were many ups, downs, victories, losses and appeals. In the summer of 1967 the series of court cases came to a close when the Supreme Court made its decision. Had it decided against the legalization of miscegenation, the process of appeals would have most likely continued and more and more cases would start to appear until they reached the same conclusion. This, however, was not necessary to any further extent because the court finally decided in favor of Richard and Mildred Loving. On June 13, 1967, *The Times* reported the Supreme Court's findings.

Marriage is one of the "basic civil rights of man," fundamental to our very existence and survival. To deny this fundamental freedom on so unsupportable a basis as the racial classifications embodied in these statutes, classifications so directly subversive of the principle of equality at the heart of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, is surely to deprive all of the state's citizens of liberty without due process of law. The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment requires that the freedom of choice to marry not be restricted by invidious racial discriminations.<sup>12</sup>

The Supreme Court, despite the fact that its statement directly contradicts the various refusals of the state courts that came before this decision, puts its whole support behind the legalization of interracial marriage. This excerpt, as well as others containing the same general message, was placed under the heading "state's view rejected," thus clarifying that any previous decisions made in lesser courts were void, and that this ruling, and only this ruling, should be the considered the ultimate law. This decision

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<sup>12</sup> "Excerpts From Supreme Court's Ruling on Virginia's Ban on Miscegenation" *The New York Times*, June 13 1967, pg. 29.

brought the court cases concerning miscegenation to an end; however, it could not bring the debate in the press to a similar halt.

In the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling, the number of articles relating to the topic stayed relatively high, at least in the four years that followed the decision. These articles, however, were mostly reports on individual state laws and court cases, and less debate. It could be predicted that the debate would vastly increase as the ramifications of the verdict were felt throughout the country. However, the amount of coverage became gradually less and less after 1971. The reporting from 1972-1975 was much more similar to the reporting from before anyone took any notice of the Lovings. The majority of these articles had to do with either entertainment or foreign affairs. The main difference was that instead of the occasional article reporting on a strange case of miscegenation, in the articles after the Supreme Court verdict, the idea is much more accepted, and only extremely unusual or interesting scenarios were covered. For instance, in 1972 the Black mayor of Tuskegee, Alabama was married to a white woman. Their relationship was very prominent in the eyes of the public, and therefore heavily publicized.

They spoke nervously about the ramifications on an interracial romance in [the Tuskegee] region. "A lot of things went through our minds," mayor Ford recalled. "We felt there might be actual physical danger. We thought about hurting our friends and relatives. We even thought about the effect it would have on my political career. Finally we came to the point, and said to hell with it. I love you and you love me, we're going to do the only honest and right thing."<sup>13</sup>

Although they had major concerns when they were first married, as they most likely should have at the time, they could finally speak freely about their experiences and their love. Instead of having to hide their relationship, as they would have in the past, they

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<sup>13</sup> Ray Jenkins, "The Tuskegee Mayor and His Wife: A Very Visible Interracial Marriage." *The New York Times*, November 9, 1972, pg. 54.

were able to assume their place as a prominent political couple, which just so happened to be of different races.

In the twenty-year period from 1955 to 1975, there was an immense amount of change in the public view of miscegenation as seen through *The New York Times*. It went from a censorship concern in the mid 1950s to an almost non-issue until the early '60s. The legalization of mixed race marriage seemed almost too inconceivable to be concerned with. The case of Loving vs. Virginia managed to, within ten years, change miscegenation from banned in most states to a legally protected right, as well as change the American opinion to one of more general acceptance. As the years progressed, the public gradually came to terms with the new laws as a part of life and eventually the coverage trailed off, leaving America's wedding chapels open for couples, no matter what race.

Unfortunately, these laws only apply to couples of different genders. The legalization of mixed race marriage was indeed a great feat for American society at the time. The striking down of the anti-miscegenation laws represented a major step forward towards free love and an open and accepting society, but the time has come again for such a leap. Homosexual couples are now in the same situation that mixed race couples were in half a century ago and they face the same challenges that interracial couples were forced to overcome. It is necessary for the American people to re-examine that past and take the lessons that the miscegenation laws have taught and apply those same ideals to couples of the same sex in the new millennium. Total freedom to love whoever one wants must be achieved in full. Without equal rights to all couples, the victory against anti-miscegenation laws will mean nothing.

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