

FEATURES



Palestinian couples sit on stage during a group wedding celebration held on November 24, 2016, for 27 couples, organized by President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement in Jenin. — AFP

## FLORENCE HENDERSON: 10 THINGS YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER EARLY CAREER

It didn't take long for Florence Henderson to hit Variety's radar after she moved to New York from her childhood home in Kentucky to pursue a career on the stage. She was dubbed "the blonde charmer" in one of her earliest mentions in the showbiz bible. Henderson, who died Thursday at 82, was inextricably linked with the ever-cheerful TV mom that she played for five seasons (and in countless revivals) on the ABC sitcom "The Brady Bunch" from 1969-74. But she had a busy career as an actress and singer for nearly 20 years before she became Carol Brady. She did Broadway, regional theater, touring productions, all manner of TV shows and had recording contracts with Kapp Records and RCA's Camden label.

### Variety

From 1958-61, she partnered with singer-actor Bill Hayes to pitch Oldsmobile cars in what qualified as a multimedia advertising campaign of the era. The pair hawked the latest models off the Olds assembly line by doing everything from nightclub engagements to TV commercials to hosting a 13-week live series on NBC, "Oldsmobile Musical Theater."

Here's a look back at Henderson's early career, as seen through the pages of Variety. The first mention of Henderson came in the Sept. 3, 1952 edition of weekly Variety, in a review of a New Haven, Conn. staging of "Oklahoma!" Our reviewer observed that Henderson was among several newcomers in the production who were able to "register" with the audience.

A few months later, Henderson's ingenue status was flagged in the Just for Variety column from Dec. 19, 1952, with an item noting

that the 18-year-old actress was heading to Los Angeles with the touring "Oklahoma!" production. Henderson landed one of the lead roles in the tuner after impressing-with all of one line-in her Broadway debut as part of the chorus in Harold Rome musical "Wish You Were Here."

### Just for Variety columnist Sheila

Graham managed to predict the "lovely lady" sobriquet to come for Henderson courtesy of the "Brady Bunch" theme song. In her Feb. 2, 1953, item on Hollywood stars flocking to the "Oklahoma!" production, Graham gushed: "And what a comer is blonde, blue-eyed, lovely voice, lovely period, Florence Henderson." Two months later, Variety was reporting chatter about screen tests "cooking" for "the blond charmer" at Universal and 20th Century Fox. Henderson was up for the role of "Oklahoma!"s Laurey in Fox's big screen rendition of the tuner, but the part eventually went to Shirley Jones, the future "Partridge Family" star who became a close friend of Henderson's.

On March 27, 1954, Henderson was part of the troupe that appeared on a Rodgers and Hammerstein tribute TV special that aired across all four broadcast networks-CBS, NBC, ABC and DuMont. Variety dubbed it "the biggest, costliest commercial hookup on record" with an estimated audience of 70 million viewers. Henderson sang a tune from "Oklahoma!" with Gordon MacRae. Henderson was a regular on TV variety shows in the 1950s and '60s, including her co-hosting stint of the CBS summer series "Sing-Along" in 1958. But in a departure into the dramatic realm, the March 20, 1957, edition of weekly Variety ran an item noting that Henderson was slated to head

to Cuba to film eight episodes of the syndicated adventure series "Captain David Grief." (It's not clear if Henderson actually made the trek to Havana.)

The teaming of Henderson and Hayes for Oldsmobile was highlighted in the March 26, 1958, edition of weekly Variety, in a story about automakers courting stars and singers for elaborate endorsement pacts. Henderson and Hayes were so popular in a nightclub stint they did in Detroit that the pair were booked at New York's St. Regis Hotel. Variety noted that they marked the first musical outfit put together by an automaker "to make the class hotel circuit."

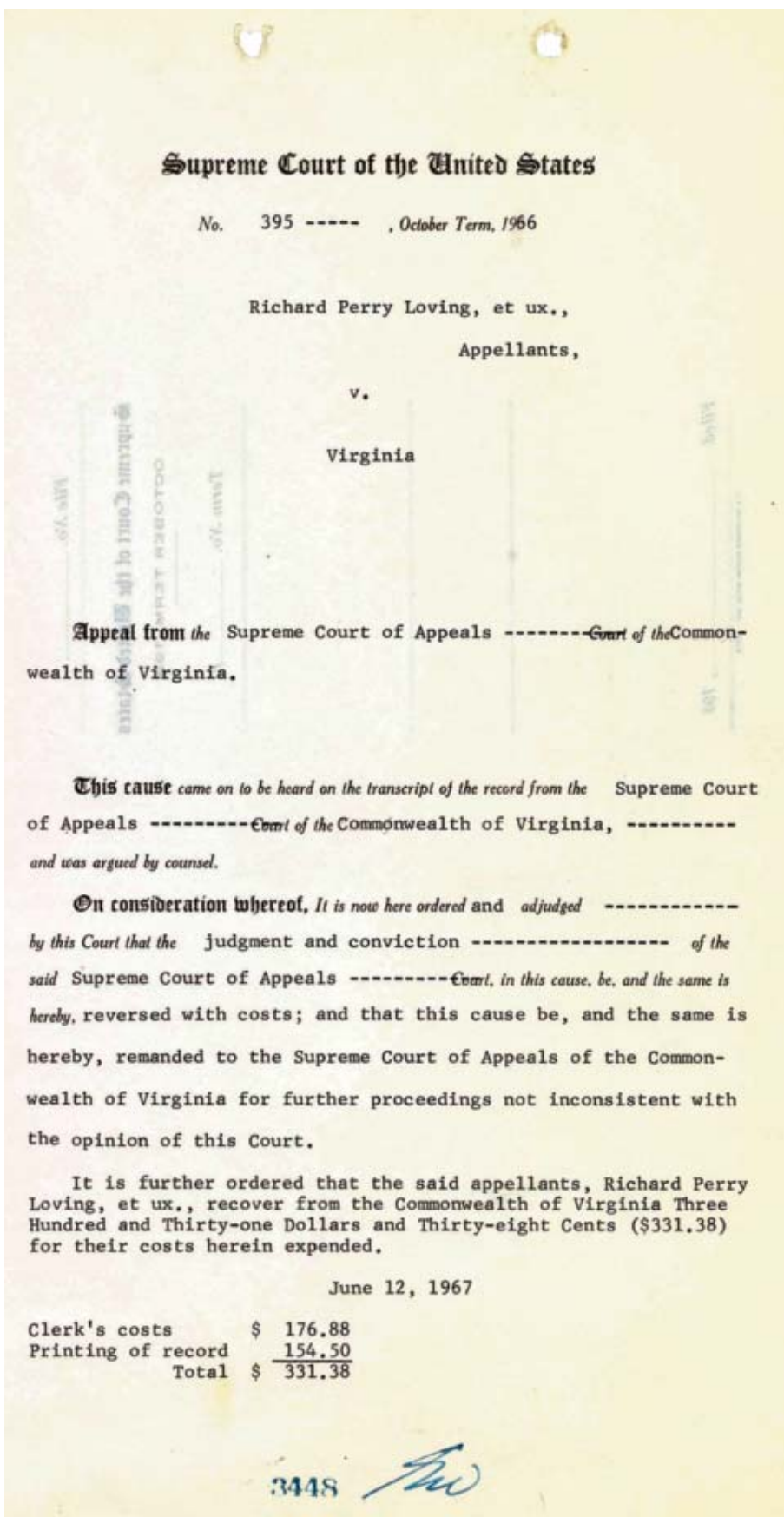
Henderson was schooled in the classics. She starred in two TV musical renditions of literary favorites: a November 1957 production of "Huck Finn" for CBS' "U.S. Steel Hour" and an October 1958 production of "Little Women," also for CBS. In both cases, Variety's reviewers found Henderson's singing to be the highlight of otherwise forgettable productions. Even as her star began to rise, Henderson never forgot the break she received in "Oklahoma!" In April 1959 she journeyed to St. Louis to sing with Hayes at a symphony performance of Richard Rodgers tunes, with Rodgers himself at the baton.

Henderson also never forgot her Roman-Catholic upbringing. In November 1960, Henderson handled the entertainment for the annual meeting of the Catholic Apostolate Radio-Television Advertising association at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel. — Reuters



This file photo taken on August 22, 2016 shows actress Florence Henderson attending the Television Academy's Performers Peer Group Celebration in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

## 'Loving!' How an interracial couple's love changed history



This image obtained from the National Archives show US Supreme Court documents dealing with the interracial marriage of Richard and Mildred Loving. — AFP

Just as a caustic election has laid bare loose threads in the US social fabric, a new film has returned to the country's all-too-recent era of deep racial segregation. "Loving"—which entered wide release in time for the US Thanksgiving holiday—follows the romance of a black woman and a white man in mid-20th century America, when laws in some states forbade interracial marriages.

The historical drama is based on a decade-long legal battle that culminated in a landmark Supreme Court decision, declaring unconstitutional legislation banning interracial marriage, known as anti-miscegenation laws.

After they wed in Washington DC, Richard and Mildred Loving returned to the US state Virginia—part of the secessionist confederacy during the Civil War—where marrying across the racial divide was forbidden.

Childhood sweethearts, Richard and Mildred wanted little more than to build a home—but in the eyes of Virginia law, the lovers were criminals. The Lovings ultimately found themselves on the front lines of a civil rights case that would change the course of US history. Half-a-century later, the 1967 ruling's impact is still reverberating: the historic judgment helped pave the way toward legalizing gay marriage in 2015.

### The right to love

Not long after the Lovings exchanged vows in Washington in 1958, police raided their home in the dead of the night. Mildred, who was pregnant, hoped the marriage certificate on the wall would shield the pair from arrest, to no avail. "That's no good here," the sheriff told her, before arresting the pair.

The couple pleaded guilty in Virginia court and received a one-year prison sentence. The punishment was suspended for 25 years on the condition that the Lovings leave the state, so they returned to Washington.

The film, which received critical acclaim following its premiere at Cannes, stars Joel Edgerton and Ruth Negga whose portrayal of Mildred Loving has her tipped as a possible Oscar nominee. The lead actors portray the couple not as militants or intellectuals, but as a shy, working-class pair determined to defend their right to love. "Tell them I love my wife," Richard tells his lawyer, when asked what he would like the Supreme Court to know.

### Unsung heroes

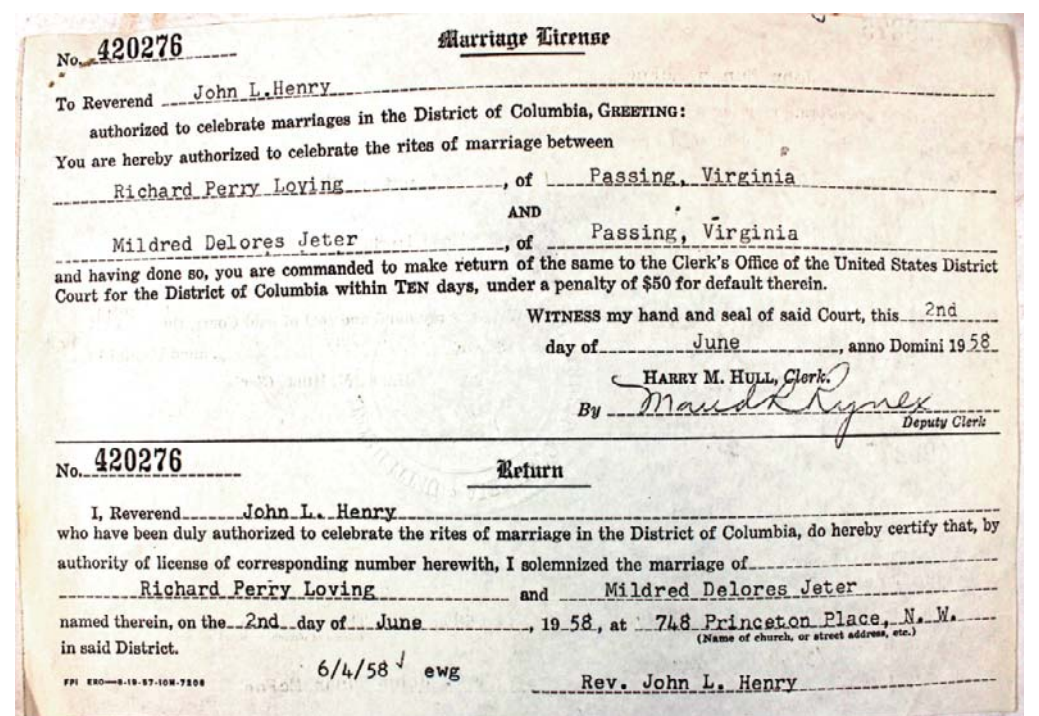
A couple whose primary aim was to leave the city and return to a life under the radar in their home state, Richard and Mildred Loving are relatively unsung heroes of the civil rights movement.

"Civil rights organizations and their allies never made reversal of the anti-miscegenation laws a major cause," historian Larry Greene of Seton Hall University told AFP, saying that housing, school desegregation and voting rights were instead the top priorities. And yet the US has a long history of barring interracial marriage, according to Robin Lenhardt, a law professor at Fordham University.

Anti-miscegenation laws existed in 30 states at one point, she said, which many people saw "as a crucial dividing line between whites and blacks, crucial to the society. For that to be removed was a bitter pill for many communities." Some states



This file photo taken on May 16, 2016 shows Irish-Ethiopian actress Ruth Negga (L) and Australian actor Joel Edgerton as they arrive for the screening of the film 'Loving' at the 69th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



This image obtained from the National Archives shows the June 2, 1958, marriage license of interracial couple Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter. — AFP

resisted the 1967 ruling: Alabama did not overturn its legislation outlawing interracial marriage until 2000, the last state to do so.

The film has been released at a time, Lenhardt said, "when the nation is thinking and worrying about racism."

Since Donald Trump's election hate speech has been on the rise, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which seeks to track and combat racism. And the past summer saw a string of

high-profile police shootings of black citizens that inflamed racial tensions nationwide. "The film is a reminder of the need to guard against the kind of racial bias that we've seen in the distant past," Lenhardt said, "but also our recent." — AFP