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Women’s History Month tribute: Alice Walker



JPAYE

Ruth Negga, an Ethiopian and Irish actress, and Joel Edgerton, an Australian actor, have made interracial dating a hot topic among many after the 2016 film “Loving” released. During the time that the married couple they portrayed — Mildred and Richard — defied Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act, they’d only been married approximately [five weeks](#) in 1958. They were forcefully split apart and ordered to live in different states to avoid imprisonment: Loving v. Virginia began in 1963. In June of 1967, the Supreme Court ruled bans against interracial marriage were unconstitutional.

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**BLACK HISTORY MONTH
LEGAL TRIBUTE: FORMER
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At the time the couple was initially arrested, [24 total states](#) across the U.S. had laws prohibiting interracial marriage. One of those states was Mississippi, where [Alice Walker married](#) civil rights lawyer Melvyn

marriage. One of those states was Mississippi, where [Alice Walker married](#) civil rights lawyer Melvyn Leventhal, a white Jewish civil rights lawyer, the same year (1967) that the Supreme Court judges made their decisions. According to Haymarket Books “[101 Changemakers](#),” Walker and Leventhal became the first legally married interracial couple in Mississippi.

While that in itself makes Walker both a changemaker and a part of history, here are 10 more facts about her in celebration of Women’s History Month.

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1. Alice Walker is the first African-American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for Literature and the National Book Award. She was honored for “The Color Purple” in 1983, which later became the 1985 film from Steven Spielberg, a New York City Broadway Theatre performance in 2005. LaChanze won a Tony award for Best Leading Actress in a Musical in 2006 for her performance in “The Color Purple.” (Sources: [New York Times](#), [PBS](#))
2. Walker was a Civil Rights Movement activist in Georgia and rejoined after moving to Mississippi. (Source: [Makers.com](#))
3. In 2006, Alice Walker went to Rwanda and the eastern Congo as part of her work with Women for Women International. While there, she witnessed the aftermath of the genocide in Kigali and wrote about it in her book “Overcoming Speechlessness.” (Source: [AliceWalkersGarden.com](#))
4. Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes discovered her first short story “To Hell With Dying” in 1967. (Source: [AliceWalkersGarden.com](#))

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5. After Walker won the Lennon/Ono Peace Grant, which is personally chosen by Yoko Hono in honor of her husband John Lennon, she donated the grant money to an orphanage in Kenya called The Margaret Okari Foundation. The orphanage cares for the children of AIDS victims in East Africa. (Sources:

Foundation. The orphanage cares for the children of AIDS victims in East Africa. (Sources: [AliceWalkersGardent.com](#), [MargaretOkari.com](#), [NME.com](#))

6. Her take on motherhood may ruffle a few feathers, including her only daughter Rebecca Grant, but she owns it. “True motherhood is accepting that everything needs to be cared for, not just your own child,” she said in an interview with The Globe and Mail. (Source: [Observer.com](#), [TheGlobeandMail.com](#))

7. Declaring herself as someone who “is tuned more to the natural world than to electoral politics,” that still didn’t stop her from writing “An Open Letter to Barack Obama” in 2008, which complimented his wife and children and said the president was “the best of the spirit of Africa and of the Americas.” (Sources: [TheGlobeandMail.com](#), [TheRoot.com](#))

8. Along with household names such as Angela Davis and Cynthia McKinney, Walker is listed as one of the jurists of The Russell Tribunal on Palestine. She served in 2010 and 2012. According to the official website, The Russell Tribunal on Palestine is “an International People’s Tribunal created by a large group of citizens involved in the promotion of peace and justice in the Middle East.” (Sources: [AliceWalkersGarden.com](#), [RussellTribunalonPalestine.com](#), [RussellTribunalonPalestine jury list](#))

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9. After attending Spelman College in Atlanta and graduating from Sarah Lawrence College in the Bronx, New York, she used a \$2,000 travel grant from the philanthropist Charles Merrill to move to Jackson, Mississippi. This is where she worked for the Legal Defense Fund of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People under the supervision of lawyer/activist Marian Wright Edelman. Her primary work there included defending African-Americans who were evicted from their homes simply for trying to register to vote. (Sources: [Emory University](#), [Encyclopedia.com](#))

10. In 1970, she accepted the appointment of writer-in-residence at Tougaloo College. Two years later, she taught the first course on Black women writers at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and Wellesley College. (Sources: [Emory University](#))

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Shamontiel L. Vaughn compiled this blog. Find out more about her at [Shamontiel.com](#).

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