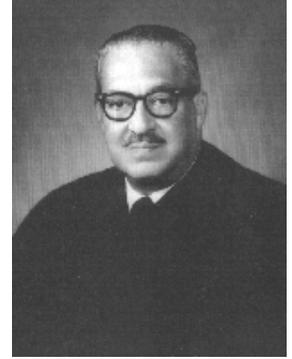


# Thurgood Marshall, Supreme Court Justice



Thurgood Marshall had one of the most recognizable names and faces of the civil rights movement in America. He gained everlasting fame as the first African-American justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Born on July 2, 1908 in Baltimore, he was named Thoroughgood, after his great-grandfather, who escaped slavery and fought for the North during the Civil War. The boy soon shortened his name to Thurgood.

He grew up very much in the shadow of segregation, graduating from Frederick Douglass High School (when he was 16) and Lincoln University. His first rejection at the hands of segregationists was a denial of admittance at the University of Maryland Law School. He went to Howard University, an African-American school, instead, and earned his law degree in 1933. The very next year, he began work for the Baltimore chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Very much a champion of the civil rights movement, Marshall made his mark by winning cases against segregation. His first big victory came in 1936, in a case known as *Murray v. Pearson*. Donald Murray was an African-American student who had been denied admission to the University of Maryland Law School solely because of his race (just like Marshall). The judge agreed that such discrimination was illegal.

The very next year, Marshall won his first case before the U.S. Supreme Court, *Chambers v. Florida*. In that case, four African-American men were part of a larger group arrested for the murder of an older white man. The four men were held without being able to have representation by a lawyer and were subjected to intense questioning that bordered on cruelty. Under such conditions, the the four men eventually confessed and were convicted of capital murder and sentenced to death. The Supreme Court ruled that the confessions were involuntary and dismissed them.

During this time, Marshall, as chief counsel for the NAACP, was also asked to help write the constitutions for the countries of Ghana and Tanzania.

Marshall began to build an impressive record of winning civil rights, especially before the Supreme Court. His most famous came in 1954, when the Court accepted his argument that "separate but equal" public schools were illegal. This was the famous *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Of the 32 cases he argued before the Supreme Court, Marshall won 29 of them. This success convinced President John F. Kennedy to appoint him to be on a federal Appeals Court, in 1961. There again, Marshall met opposition, this time from white Senators who didn't want segregation to succeed. He was on the court for the first several months "on a provisional basis" before his appointment was approved. As a member of the Appeals Court, Marshall wrote 150 decisions. Of those, 98 were majority decisions, and none of those was overturned by the Supreme court. He served for four years and was then appointed Solicitor General, a very powerful position. That person argues the U.S. Government's case before the Supreme Court. In that capacity, Marshall argued 19 cases before the Court and won 14 of them.

In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson, who had appointed Marshall Solicitor General, appointed him to the Supreme Court. His nomination was approved, and he became the first African-American on the Court.

A powerful and tireless voice for civil rights and for minorities in general, Marshall served on the Court for 24 years. He consistently opposed the death penalty, routinely writing that it inherently violated the Eighth Amendment protection against "cruel and unusual punishment." He also consistently upheld and worked to expand the rights of women, children, prisoners, and the homeless.

Ill health forced Marshall to retire from the Court in 1991. He died two years later.

Marshall was married twice and is survived by one wife and two sons. His first wife died of cancer in 1955. His surviving sons are from his second marriage. Many schools and other buildings have been named after him.