

LEGEND

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granted today

Won Important Cases

It is said that Thurgood Marshall tackled problems, no matter how difficult. He distinguished himself as a civil rights advocate and won some very important cases. As early as 1944, he won the right for Blacks to vote in primary elections in the state of Texas. In another case, he succeeded in removing legal barriers so Black students could attend white law schools. In the state of Virginia, Marshall was victorious in ending segregation on interstate carriers (buses and trains). He also won a court ruling that restrictive housing covenants were unconstitutional.

Champion for Children

In the early 1950s, African American leaders decided it was time to challenge segregation. They were especially concerned about the so-called "separate but equal" public schools in the South. In most such schools, Black students received used books and school furniture. There were no "equal" schools between Black and white students. Often, Black children walked long distances to attend their school. Sometimes this meant walking past nearby white schools.

Brown vs. Board of Education

So in 1951, Thurgood Marshall began developing a case against the legality of school desegregation. He called for lawyers, Black and white, to assist him in the preparation. Earlier, the NAACP had brought anti-segregation suits into federal courts. These suits against school districts were brought in five different states. Marshall and his colleagues combined the arguments of the five cases into one case: *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Oliver Brown of Topeka, Kansas filed a petition for his daughter, Linda, to attend a neighborhood school. Marshall designed the case so as to ask the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision. That decision, long ago, ruled that public facilities which were "separate, but equal" were constitutional.

While most members of the court favored overturning the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case, they were resistant to eliminating segregation. Chief Justice Earl Warren worked long and hard for a unanimous decision. After months of deliberations and persuasion, on May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court handed down its ruling: "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." Thurgood Marshall was joyous! He knew the decision would begin the slow process of desegregating public schools. It was by far Marshall's most famous case.

Greatest Award: Mr. Civil Rights, Nickname

Marshall did not let up, after his victory. He earned the reputation as a fighter for the little people, the poor people, regardless of color. Some called him "Mr. Civil Rights." His thirst for justice and equality was deeply ingrained in his philosophy. He argued 32 cases before the Supreme Court and won 29 of them. He was a man of courage, receiving numerous awards and honors. One of the most treasured awards was from the organization he served for so long. The NAACP awarded him its highest award, the Spingarn Medal of Honor.

Appointment by President Kennedy

In 1961, Marshall was appointed Judge of the United States District Court. He was already a well-established legal figure. He continued his concern for equal rights for all citizens. After four years with the District Court, President John F. Kennedy persuaded him to accept the appointment as U.S. Solicitor-General.

President Johnson Chose Marshall for Supreme Court

When a vacancy occurred on the Supreme Court, President Lyndon B. Johnson selected Thurgood Marshall as the first African American to serve as Associate Justice. His reputation as a champion for the rights of citizens followed him into this highest court in the land. Justice Marshall continued to vote on the side of the poor, minorities and women. Major changes occurred during his 23 years on the bench. During the Earl Warren years, the Supreme Court was considered "liberal" and public policies were enacted which gave rights to minorities and women. Once the court became more "conservative," Marshall fought just as hard for those issues he believed in. While he was a dissenter on many cases in recent years, nevertheless, he wrote eloquently about his beliefs and rationale as a dissenter.

The grandson of a slave rose to great heights. As a very hard worker, he surrounded himself with intelligent, caring people. Law clerks who worked under him valued those special insights gained. Even as he aged, he continued the struggle.

Retired Due to Ill Health

On June 27, 1991, Marshall stunned the public by announcing his retirement from the Supreme Court. His fragile health and advancing age caused him to step down. Yet, whenever his health would permit, he accepted assignments and responsibilities.

Death Came on Jan. 24, 1993

His death caused the public to reflect on the life and work of a man of uncommon ability who focussed on common people. His legacy is an example for all to witness. Indeed, Thurgood Marshall is a LEGEND!

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