

# The life and career of thurgood marshall and his impact on the society

[History](#), [American History](#)



Thurgood Marshall is one of the greatest figures when referring to the black civil rights movement in America. He's often one of the more unsung heroes and figures during this movement that sparked the beginning for racial equality for blacks in America.

Thurgood Marshall was born July 2nd, 1908 in Baltimore Maryland. Thurgood completed high school in 1925 and would later attend Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. It would be there where he would meet his first wife Vivian Burey. Later on, in their marriage, Vivian would, unfortunately, die at the age of 44 of cancer. Before this would happen though Thurgood Marshall would apply to the University of Maryland School of Law after he graduated from Lincoln. Despite him being more than qualified to attend this program he would end up being denied admission because of his ethnicity. As demoralizing this probably was Thurgood Marshall would not let that discourage him from accomplishing his goals. He would apply to Howard University's Law school where he wouldn't be denied admission because of his race. Today Howard is still one of the more prestigious predominate African American schools in the country. While he was there Dean Charles Hamilton Houston would help guide him and other law school students and served almost as a mentor to Marshall. Charles was very passionate that his students should use their time at the law school program as a means of social change and transformation in our country. He recognized the difficulties of growing up black in America. He would have a huge impact on Thurgood's education at Howard. In 1933 Marshall would receive his law degree ranked first in his graduating class. After his graduation, Marshall

opened a private practice law firm in Baltimore where he was close to his family.

Marshall would have pretty good success as a lawyer, but his first major victory would be in *Murray v. Pearson*. What made this victory so sweet is it was almost like a revenge or payback story. Marshall would successfully sue the University of Maryland for the denial of a black applicant, similar to what had happened to him in his education. This was probably the best way to have a major introductory into his law career. The fact that this victory was over the same university that had denied his admission because he was black is a huge slap in the face. After his victory over the University of Maryland, he'd become a staff lawyer for the NAACP for a few years. His time with the NAACP would eventually turn him into the Chief of arguable the largest Civil Rights and liberties organization in the United States at the time and still is one of the largest today.

Throughout his time as a lawyer, Thurgood Marshall was easily recognized as one of the more elite and top tier attorneys in the United States. He would post up an impressive ninety-one-win percentage among his cases as an attorney only losing two cases. This is extremely impressive at this time and was the biggest fueling point that resulted in his future confirmation as a Supreme Court Justice.

During his time as an attorney, Thurgood Marshall would have very large victories and famous cases. One of his earlier cases was *Chambers v. Florida* in 1940. This was one Thurgood Marshall earlier successes as an attorney.

Four black men were accused of the murder of a Floridan white man who had confessed to the murder, but Thurgood Marshall having taken on the case uncovered evidence that proved their innocence. After deeper digging into the case, Marshall had found that their confessions were coerced, and deputies used torture tactics to get these confessions out of these men. With these findings being presented in front of the Supreme court it was concluded that officers had violated the Due Process laws through the 8th and 14th Amendments. This was a very successful defense for Marshall and one of his largest to go onto his resume. Marshall was only thirty-two at the time which made this highly impressive.

Four years after his amazing feat he would take on another case, Smith v. Allwright in 1944. This case is very unique with its details. A state law in Texas that required all democratic Party voters to be white raised some questions and was argued in front of the supreme court. A black man Lonnie E. Smith sued county S. S Allwright who was an election official for the right to vote. Thurgood Marshall had to convince the Supreme Court that this infringed on Lonnie's rights and he did. The Court would strike this law stating that by having racial limitations on voting laws it violates the equal protection clause under the fourteenth amendment. The court also stated that for the state of Texas to allow the Democratic party to regulate election rules and regulations that this allows discrimination which was also in violation of the constitution. This case although it seems minor to some was actually huge at the time, if you really analyze all the details surrounding the

case it's crazy that he had a law that was in place for years and a huge foundation in elections in Texas overturned.

Marshall would argue many, many more cases at this time and just four years once again after this victory Marshall would yet again score a case in front of the supreme court. In 1948 Marshall would stamp another victory under his resume in Shelley v. Kraemer. A neighborhood in Missouri had been creating their own restrictions which prevented blacks and Asians from living in the neighborhood. In 1945 the Shelley family had moved into the neighborhood. Louis Kraemer was not in favor of the move since it was a black family that had moved into the neighborhood. Kraemer try to enforce a covenant to prevent the Shelley family from moving into the neighborhood. Although the facts of the case may seem like they lean towards the Shelley's by the constitution despite the racial tensions, it was more difficult than easy since a similar lawsuit had recently been decided in Detroit. The state and supreme court both ruled in that case, the covenants were valid and ok to still be enforced. Despite this, the supreme court decided to consolidate the cases on appeal. Despite previous precedents, Thurgood Marshall swayed the court and produced a unanimous decision from the supreme court that the covenant violated the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment.

The dominance that Marshall had as an attorney at this time was amazing. Marshall growing up and succeeding in a society that had been in favor of his downfall was spectacular. Not many African Americans at this time were known to have this much success in America and definitely, no other African

American had been able to this within the Judicial System. Marshall's ability as an attorney had been unmatched by many and much of his opposition had been in fear to take him on in a case.

Thurgood Marshall would later have another win in front of the supreme court in 1950. Sweatt V. Painter would be Marshall's next obstacle as justice and it would test another precedent in U. S history in Plessy v. Ferguson, which is one of the more infamous and renowned cases we learn in history. This case would also be involved with an admission denial of an African American. In 1946 a black student by the name of Heman Marion Sweatt applied for admission to the University of Texas' Law School. But admission to this program was limited to whites. Because of the racial prejudices within this program, Sweatt requested that the state order his admission, the university later attempted to provide access to another law school for black students. Yet again Marshall was tested with another case that would test the limitations of the 14th amendment. Marshall would battle this case and since Texas had offered access to another educational facility it presented more questions to be answered. The Supreme had finally come to a decision where they held a unanimous decision as well. The court ruled in favor of Sweatt and held that the Equal Protection Clause required admission to the University of Texas. This was yet another success to go under Marshall's belt and another win to add to the list.

Despite already making a tremendous impact in the civil rights era in America and already being considered one of the greatest universities in U. S history Marshall was far from finished. Marshall would have another

tremendous impact in the U. S judicial system and it would become his most infamous case in history. The landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education is one of if not the most important case in U. S history. This case turned out to reshape the entire American legal system and change America in general. This case was very important to the US and Completely abolished the previous ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson and ended a long standpoint of separate but equal.

When tensions had risen and began to question the true fairness in the Education system continued to be a huge debate for Americans everywhere. Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and Washington D. C. dealt with this basis of segregation in public schools. In every case leading up to this access to a public school had been denied and upheld by the courts. The Separate but Equal clause was always thought to be justified up until this point. Busing was one of the only ways to desegregate schools up until this point and it was often too difficult for some to complete. Many parents were concerned about their children's education and thought that this was one of the only ways to get a fair education. Although it was thought that many of these public education systems that blacks had access to were just separate, they were still far from equal. The conditions of these schools were not nearly the same quality as the white exclusive schools. And materials such as books were outdated at this point and they received fewer federal funds.

Despite the lack of success that other cases relating to the same topic that had previously reached the supreme court had. Marshall was confident in his ability to when this case landed in his hand. Also, at this time Earl Warren,

one of the more famous liberal supreme court justices in U. S history had recently been the latest justice added to the court. Warren made this case a little easier for Thurgood Marshall to secure the win. Marshall knew that many other things would have to be presented for the Supreme Court to overrule this and allowed integrated schools. Marshall did this by presenting the facts of the horrible and lesser conditions between white and black schools attacking an equal standpoint. Proving that these schools were the complete opposite of equal was the biggest factor in winning this case. Marshall also touched on the ethics of it which was also still huge in winning this case. The conclusion of this case ended in a unanimous decision delivered by Warren which stated that the simple fact that there are separate but equal educational facilities that discriminate based on race is inherently unequal. The court believed that the separation between schools automatically violates the Equal Protection Clause. The decision also stated that if children feel inferior to others that this will stunt a child's development and growth. This was huge and warren wanted all Americans to understand that it was ethically right to have in US law.

The end of this case was one of the biggest changes to the U. S legal system and the U. S society as well. This was the beginning of outlawing segregation everywhere this only outlawed segregation within public schools but in the future segregation everywhere would cease to exist. The long foundation of Jim Crow Laws under the Separate but Equal Clause was now flawed within the U. S. Although there were ways that many southern states had tried to



enforce segregation within schools onto American citizens it was no longer legal.

Sadly, not long after this extraordinary feat, Marshall had suffered the death of his wife a few months after the decision. His first wife Vivian would succumb to Cancer. Not long after the death of his first wife however, he would wind up marrying another woman named Cecilia Suyat. He would end up having two children by her in their marriage.

In 1961 happiness and success would find its way to Marshall once again as Kennedy would appoint Marshall to the U. S court of appeals, four years later President LBJ would make him the first black Solicitor General. Marshall was not far at all from becoming the first-ever black supreme justice and his past made him seem like the clear-cut guy as a Justice.

In 1967 LBJ would do more good for Marshall by appointing him to become the first-ever black supreme court Justice. This made the Supreme Court even more liberal and the lineup consisted of people who were very accepting and open-minded about things presented their way.

During his time as a Supreme Court, Justice Marshall would continue his contributions to the civil rights movement with his position on the Supreme Court. His tenure would consist of him continuing the civil rights movement along with enacting affirmative action laws and limited criminal punishment in some cases. He'd argue against the death penalty in *Furman v. Georgia* in 1972 and would also be a big part of the ruling of another famous previous

case in Roe v. Wade. Which ruled that the right to privacy under the due process clause would be violated if a state restricts an abortion.

Later in his career in 1991 Marshall would be forced to retire from the supreme court because of his constant decline in health. His replacement would be Clarence Thomas. Two years after Marshall's death in 1993 Marshall would pass due to heart failure, at the time he was 84.

Before his death in 1978 the Texas Southern University Law school was renamed and recognized as the Thurgood Marshall School of Law. The school today is still very strong in the education of minority law students and still typically ranks in the top 5 in the nation for the amount of black alum produced. The Thurgood Marshall College Fund was later established in 1987 and is strong support for students that attend predominately blacks universities and colleges. Just a few years ago a biography in commemoration of the black justice was produced in 2017.

Often Marshall is overlooked in history for his contribution of molding current-day American society and isn't often accredited enough for these contributions to society. Marshall's impact on civil liberties and various human rights is one of the most inspiring and amazing parts of his life. He dedicated himself to make life in America better for others and helped bring about the development of social programs that create a better living for Americans.

- <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/thurgood-marshall>
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