



**July 15, 2016**

**The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Commemorates  
Justice Thurgood Marshall's 108<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

In light of recent events and the current vacancy on the Supreme Court, the Commission would like to remember how far our nation has come in its journey to equal civil rights. July 2, 2016 marked the 108th birthday of Justice Thurgood Marshall. Justice Marshall was the first person of color to be nominated for a seat on the Supreme Court of the United States, serving on the Court from 1967-1991. Born in Baltimore Maryland in 1908, Justice Marshall grew up to be one of the most effective civil rights lawyers in United States' history. Shortly after graduating from Howard University School of Law, Justice Marshall began his work with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). At 32 years old, Justice Marshall won his first case in front of the Supreme Court. *Chambers v. Florida* overturned the convictions of four black men who had been compelled to confess under duress.

That same year, in 1940, Justice Marshall founded the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. As the chief counsel of the organization, he argued many landmark civil rights cases before the Supreme Court. These included *Shelley v. Kramer*, *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. *Shelley v. Kramer* ended state court enforcement of racially-based restrictive covenants meant to prevent people of color from living in certain residential areas. *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* marked the end of segregation in graduate and professional education settings. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the most significant Supreme Court decision of the twentieth century, ruled segregation in public schools was unconstitutional and ended the doctrine of "separate but equal."

Justice Marshall was appointed in 1961 to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals by President John F. Kennedy. Four years later, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed him as Solicitor General. He was the first black person to hold the office. President Johnson nominated Justice Marshall to the Supreme Court in 1967 following the retirement Justice Tom C. Clark. During his tenure on the Court, Justice Marshall championed and protected the constitutional rights of individuals. He was an outspoken opponent to capital punishment and a supporter of the rights for criminal suspects.

Justice Marshall retired from the court in 1991, after twenty-four years on the bench. He died two years later of heart failure and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Today, Justice Marshall remains an inspiration to many and a giant in the field of civil rights. His impact is not forgotten. While commemorating his 108th birthday, we ought to recall some of Justice Marshall's discerning words in light of today's controversial times:

*"What is the quality of your intent? . . . When we intend to do good, we do. When we intend to do harm, it happens. What each of us must come to realize is that our intent always comes through."*

Commission Chairman Martin R. Castro stated on behalf of the Commission, "The legacy of Justice Thurgood Marshall lives on today in the work of the U.S Commission on Civil Rights, and in those of us who but for his work in *Brown v. Board of Education* would not now be where we are. We must continue to work to ensure that his vision of fairness and justice is a reality for all Americans."

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