



# Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary

*Juan Williams*

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**Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary** Juan Williams

This New York Times Notable Book of the Year, 1998, is now in trade paper.

From the bestselling author of *Eyes on the Prize*, here is the definitive biography of the great lawyer and Supreme Court justice.

## Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary Details

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Author : Juan Williams

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## From Reader Review Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary for online ebook

### Carolyn says

Didn't know who Juan Williams was until I read this book about 12 years ago. Just a brilliant account of one of the trailblazers of the Civil Rights Movement who doesn't get enough credit in my view. Not to mention he was the first African American appointed to the Supreme Court under Lyndon Johnson. Excellent book.

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### Ryan Holiday says

Although an informative book, Juan Williams' Thurgood Marshall is an all too common example of a biography where the strength of the subject is forced to shine through weak writing. It is unfortunate that publishers allow the prominence of radio hosts and television pundits almost free reign to chronicle the lives of important historical figures knowing full well that the combination of names will often outweigh the quality of the book.

In this case, Thurgood Marshall is not done justice by Williams. However, considering there are almost no viable alternatives for anyone researching the life of one of the most powerful black man in American history, we must make due.

The chapter on the Justice's political maneuvering - Machiavellian Marshall - is particularly strong and interesting. The period after Marshall graduated from law school but before becoming lead counsel for the NAACP is also a crucial look at the formative part of his legal education. Those, I'm sad to say, are the only parts that really dive into what makes Marshall tick. The reader would be better served by more of them.

American Revolutionary is by no means a fluff piece or a poorly written work. It is however fairly shallow and not the substantive biography that Marshall (and the public) deserve.

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### Paul Gibson says

A solid biography. Nothing exceptional about the writing but the fact that it is very competent while keeping the book laudably fair and balanced.

Thurgood Marshall wasn't a terribly likable guy, and grew much less likable as he aged, but he was so much more important to his times than I ever knew. We hear so much about MLK and other civil rights heroes and far too little of Marshall's time extended contributions. This is terribly unfortunate. His unique personality proved important to his early career; he was one of a few who could have accomplished what he did where he did, under trying circumstances. I'm glad I read this book.

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### John Bohnert says

I learned a great deal about Thurgood Marshall in this interesting biography.

## Caroline says

I have to confess, to my shame, that I never really knew who Thurgood Marshall was until I read *Devil in the Groves: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America* earlier in the year, in which he represented the 'Groveland Boys'. I found the glimpse of his role as chief lawyer for the NAACP in some of the most important civil rights cases fascinating, so when I came across this book I snapped it up to read. Having done so, I would say it is a must-read for anyone remotely interested in the Civil Rights Movement in America.

Thurgood Marshall was involved in almost all of the major civil rights cases of the era, most visibly *Brown v. Board of Education*, that paved the way for the integration of schools. He represented African-Americans against trumped-up murder charges, assault and rape charges; investigated charges of racism in the armed forces in Korea and Japan; won cases ending segregation on interstate buses, in colleges and universities, in housing contracts and primary elections; made the first challenge against the 'separate but equal' doctrine. After his career in the NAACP he later appointed the first African-American Solicitor General by JFK, and later the first African-American Justice of the Supreme Court.

Thurgood Marshall was arguably one of the most important figures in the Civil Rights Movement; many would argue, and I'm inclined to agree after reading this, that his role was as important, if not more so, as that of Martin Luther King Jr. Whilst King may have lent the movement its Messianic figurehead, Marshall was the one who arguably led the vanguard of change, believing as he did that change in minds and attitudes would necessarily follow changes in law.

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## Roger says

Juan Williams does a great job examining that life of Mr. Civil Rights. Talks of his upbringing in Baltimore and the effect on his thinking and actions. His role in the NAACP and running the Legal Defense Fund brings out his skill in bring court actions that changed America with *Brown versus The Board of Education* being one of the 20th Century's greatest legal decision. His elevation to the Supreme Court was not without its struggle with many senators from the Old South holding keep positions and trying to knock him down. His tenure on the Court was not without controversy especially when the Court became conservative in his later years. Marshall was not without his fobles-liked his drink and had fondness for women. He would survive in today's culture. Overall, glad I had taken the time to read this book and learn more about a man who helped reshape America in its society and race relationships.

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## Neal Hunter says

I am extremely thankful how candid Williams chose to discuss the life, legacy, and impact of such an extraordinary individual. Considering the timing I chose to read this book, embedded in a nationwide uproar over the most recent nominee to the Supreme Court, it is easy to conceptualize the challenges that Marshall faced in his bid for the Supreme Court.

It is also important to understand his moral failings as well. Williams discussed numerous times the liberty he took with women and his proclivity towards doing things that would absolutely have been highly

controversial today. It leaves a lot of questions about someone I respect and believe to be one of the greatest figures in American History. I greatly appreciate the open narrative that showed Marshall was deeply flawed in a lot of senses, he was unequivocally human, as we all are.

One of the greatest civil rights leaders in our nation's history, this is absolutely a read that will captivate, challenge, and evolve your understanding of the movement, the man, and other leaders throughout the era.

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### **Richard Thompson says**

Juan Williams book comes across as a fair portrait, neither hero worship nor hatchet job.

Marshall was a drinker, a smoker, a party animal and a womanizer. He came from a relatively privileged background and was in awe of rich and powerful white guys in his youth (a weakness he never fully overcame). He was ambitious to the point of neglecting his family and choosing his battles.

Marshall did do a lot dismantle Jim Crow practices and laws, and to push for racial equality under the law. Marshall's main claim to fame was "the Brown case" in which he argued before the Supreme Court that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional and should be outlawed. He won that case, but virtually nobody (including Marshall) pushed to ensure that the law was enforced in a timely fashion. There was some progress over the years, but if John Oliver's reporting is to be believed, the Supreme Court has been siding in recent years with segregationists to the point that things have reverted to almost the point they were in 1950's... kind of depressing....

Reading the last chapter of the book that describes Marshall's funeral and the outpouring of grief and praise (much of it from people who had treated him pretty shoddily during his time on the Supreme Court), I was reminded of Shel Silverstein's song ROUGH ON THE LIVING with its chorus:

Yeah, Nashville is rough on the livin'  
But she really speaks well of the dead.

This was book #37 on our 2017 Read-alouds List.

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### **Shawna says**

A really great book. Interesting, educational, personal. This book taught me so much about the civil rights movement and what daily life was like for the average black person of that era. Marshall's personal life was not so admirable.

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### **George Bradford says**

A genuine American hero of the 20th Century, Marshall was a brilliant trial lawyer for several decades before being nominated for the Supreme Court.

This book covers it all. From his childhood in Baltimore, through his education, his career as a fearsome attorney and his tenure as a legal giant on the United States Supreme Court.

## Victor Corral says

Juan Williams' writing, while mediocre, sheds light on the life and work of a man who perhaps did the most to dismantle (though not completely) institutional racism in America.

The chronological narrative plows through many of Marshall's legal battles, sometimes too briefly, but gives a good overview of many of them. Perhaps the book's biggest strength is both its scope (it covers his whole life), and the personal stories and battles between Marshall and his contemporaries (both inside and outside the civil rights movement), which is incredibly entertaining, like a civil rights soap.

The book's best parts were not Marshall's great ability to find and argue historic cases to integrate American society, but the behind-the-scenes politics he engaged in with everyone from racist southern judges and cops, to J. Edgar Hoover, MLK, LBJ, the Kennedy's (he hated Bobby), as well as the NAACP leadership and the civil rights leaders. Marshall was quick witted, a hard drinker, jokester, womanizer and sexual harasser, unabashedly spoke his mind, stormed out of ceremonies (even those in which he was being honored), a master politician, and would tell anyone, if they deserved it, to go fuck themselves. I have even more respect for his life, his work, and his life-long commitment to ensuring equality in America after reading this book.

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## Jeremy Perron says

Thurgood Marshall is one of the primary movers of the United States in the twentieth century. He was a trailblazer who challenged racial segregation head-on in the courts and won. Marshall reversed the over a half century precedent of 'separate but equal' by making the Supreme Court to finally see correctly what the Fourteenth Amendment is supposed to mean.

Williams traces a young Thurgood Marshall who grew up in Maryland and was mostly uninfected by the segregation system that he would come to challenge. It was not until he grew up and wanted to go law school when he found out that he could not get into the prestigious state law school and had to make other arrangements. His mother, Norma, dominated the house that he grew up in. She strongly pushed both her sons, and despite living in a world where everything was stacked against them, Norma ended up with a doctor and a lawyer.

After graduating from Lincoln University, where he attended with Langston Hughes, he was denied entrance to the University of Maryland because of his race. Marshall was forced to go to Howard Law School, which was anything but prestigious. Fortunately for Marshall—and ultimately the United States—Marshall's arrival coincided with the arrival of Charles Houston as the dean. Houston's rigorous curriculum help prepare Marshall to become the lawyer that would change the nation.

Marshall goes to work for the NAACP where he helps establish the Legal Defense Fund. Williams' shows Marshall taking on case after case. He defends poor black people down on their luck, and he attacks segregation at every opportunity for everyone but himself. While becoming the bane of Jim Crow, he felt as a lawyer he needed to obey the law no matter how immoral it was. His work to improve the lives of the African-American community led to him earning the nickname 'Mr. Civil Rights.'

Marshall had admirers in the white mainstream community as well as the African-American community. Williams' explains a great deal of strange alliances that Marshall made throughout his career, none more

peculiar than his alliance with J. Edger Hoover.

As Marshall built his career by challenging Jim Crow at the graduate school and college level, but he really made history with his victory in *Brown v. the Board of Education* that overturned the evil of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

“No one had to tell him this was the biggest case of his career. This case could change the face of American society. Marshall began calling conferences of the brightest minds from around the nation to discuss every angle of the case. Lawyers, law professors, sociologists, anthropologists, and even psychologists, notably Ken Clark, all came to Marshall’s office to discuss how to convince the Court that separate but equal was a devastating burden to black people, nothing more than racism.” (p.209)

Biographies are not worth much if you do not learn something about the people whom the subject shared the stage of history. If you read a biography of Abraham Lincoln and you learn nothing of Stephen Douglas, then the biography fails. In the case Marshall, I learned a great deal on his Brown adversary John W. Davis. All I knew about Davis was his status as the Democratic nominee for President in 1924 and the segregation defender in the Brown decision. The irony is Marshall, as a law student, used to watch Davis before the Supreme Court regularly and actually admired him. Marshall would after Brown tell people that beat Davis but knew few who did.

Davis kind of reminds me of polite anti-marriage equality people. Who maybe personally nice and polite and may not actually hate their opponents but are completely blind to the mass of hatred that is sitting to the right behind them.

As the fifties turned into the sixties the rank and file of the Civil Rights Movement—especially the younger members—got tired of the slow crawl of integration and embraced the non-violent direct action methods. The leader of this new generation of civil rights leaders was Martin Luther King, Jr. There was a huge generation gap between the young pastor and the older lawyer. Marshall thought King was nice enough young man who could give good speeches but he also felt that King and his associates got way too much credit for the work that people like him really did. Nevertheless, he kept a united front with King and never publicly criticized him.

While Marshall had his reservations on Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference he had a respect for them; unlike Black Nationalist movement that Marshall absolutely despised. He couldn’t stand Malcolm X and refused to meet with him even after the later dropped his separatist ideas. To Marshall, Black Nationalism was undermining everything he had worked for in his entire life.

While not only working for civil rights at home, Marshall went aboard under an invitation from the new nation of Kenya to come and aid them in writing their constitution. This great act of a statesmanship increased his international prestige.

During the Kennedy Administration, Marshall filled his lifelong ambition and became a judge. Now serving on the U.S. court of appeals, Marshall’s name disappeared from the newspapers and he was now working on business cases the completely disinterested him. Marshall was relieved when he was asked by President Johnson to become the U.S. Solicitor General. This was an interesting switch for him, because for years he challenged the system and now he was the government’s top lawyer.

The high point of Marshall’s life was his appointment to the Supreme Court. He would be the first African-American to be appointed to this high position. However in reading Williams’ account Marshall’s experience of the court was not what he thought it was going to be.

Marshall is unquestionably one of the greatest American lawyers in our history. Marshall easily ranks up

there with the likes of Henry Clay and Clarence Darrow. As a justice however, although he breaks major color barrier in American society, his career on the Supreme Court was not anywhere near as successful as his earlier career had been. Part of this is not his fault. He lacked opportunity due the changing climate on the court. After his confirmation a conservative backlash would have the Republicans winning five out of the next six presidential elections. This resulted in the Court growing evermore conservative. Marshall would find himself in the minority and writing dissents more often than not. In addition, throughout his stay on the Court he was suffering from numerous health problems. This would also contribute to his declining effectiveness on the Court.

I highly recommend this book. I disagree with Juan Williams' on many things politically but his historical work is awesome and he put together an incredible biography of one of our great statesmen Thurgood Marshall.

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### **Mike says**

One of the best biographies I've ever read. Williams perfectly blends research and journalistic flair in this intimate portrait of a giant in the American civil rights movement.

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### **Bruce says**

Juan Williams did a great job here. I was surprised at his competence and literary acumen. This said, he told a very compelling and important story. Great read.

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### **Annieamw Wilson says**

This is such an excellent biography, and especially timely in light of Obama's election. Marshall was a fascinating man who lived in fascinating times. As a lawyer, I really liked the legal aspect as well, but think a non-lawyer would enjoy it too. The author makes history come alive.

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