

Information on Thurgood Marshall

Thurgood Marshall (far left in the picture) was a civil rights lawyer and U.S. Supreme Court justice who worked for civil rights from the 1930s until his retirement in 1991. Marshall was born in 1908 and was raised by two working parents in Baltimore, Maryland, and Harlem, New York, in a strongly segregated (racially separate) environment. From the time he was young, Marshall was encouraged by his father to use the law to achieve justice for African Americans. William Marshall took Thurgood and his brother to hear court cases so that they could learn the skills of legal argument. As a young student, Thurgood was assigned to read the Constitution as punishment for classroom mischief; however, he memorized it instead. Marshall attended all-black Lincoln University in Chester, Pennsylvania, and then went on to get his law degree at Howard University in Washington DC. He became so skilled in discussing the law that his university debate team called him "Wrathful Marshall."

In the 1930s, Marshall joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization that promoted African-American civil rights. During his tenure with the organization, Marshall fought many court cases for clients too poor to pay him. Without regard for money, he battled tirelessly to place blacks on juries, gain equal pay for African-American teachers, and enlist black pilots for World War II. From the 1940s to the 1960s, Marshall played a critical role in winning almost every major civil rights case. One of the most important cases he contributed to was the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, in which the Supreme Court ruled that school segregation was unconstitutional. With his flawless logic, dignified aura, and straightforward speech, Marshall won 29 of the 32 cases he argued before the Supreme Court. President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed him as one of nine Supreme Court justices in 1967, bestowing on him the highest honor for a lawyer in the country.

Stop Here & Discuss

- **What did Marshall do for the NAACP?**
- **What was the *Brown v. Board of Education* case?**
- **How many Supreme Court cases did Marshall win and lose?**
- **What did the president of the United States appoint him to do in 1967?**

Throughout his life, Thurgood Marshall faced threats of death and violence from southern whites who opposed his fight for racial equality. One such incident occurred in 1946, several months after Marshall had won the acquittal of 24 out of 25 black defendants in a case involving interracial violence. One night in 1946, Marshall was driving to Nashville, Tennessee, with two other NAACP lawyers, Z. Alexander Looby and Maurice Weaver. As

they passed through Columbia, Tennessee, a group of eight white city police, state troopers, and sheriffs followed and stopped Marshall's car, telling the lawyers they had a warrant to search the car for illegal alcohol. The officers conducted the search and found nothing. They let the three men go, but stopped them again one mile down the road. This time, the police grabbed Marshall, accused him of driving intoxicated, and told the other two lawyers to leave. The police drove Marshall toward the Duck River, where members of the Ku Klux Klan were waiting with a noose to lynch him. However, Looby and Weaver gathered a group of armed black residents and followed the police car. The police were thus forced to drive instead to the local magistrate's office in town, where Marshall blew his breath forcefully into the official's face to prove his sobriety.

Despite several more threats to his life, Marshall's success in winning civil rights cases continued to grow. From 1967 to 1991, he served faithfully on the Supreme Court. During his tenure, he presided over hundreds of court cases, and sought to make the Constitution a truly "living document" to support justice for all races.

Stop Here & Discuss

- **What did Marshall do between 1967 and 1991?**

Information on Ernest Green

At only 16 years of age, Ernest Green became a leader of the civil rights movement by bravely initiating the desegregation of Southern schools. Born in 1941 and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, Green had attended all-black, segregated schools all his life. These schools typically had outdated textbooks, inadequate supplies and facilities, and poor funding. Green was an ambitious

student, and in 1957, when he was a high school junior, he made a dramatic decision. He decided to leave most of his friends at the all-black high school and enroll at all-white Central High School for his senior year. He wanted a better education for himself and to pave the way for future generations of black children to attend the best schools available. Eight other black students joined Green in integration efforts at Central High. They came to be known as the "Little Rock Nine."

Most whites in Little Rock strongly opposed integration. Arkansas governor Orval Faubus, mindful of voter opinion in an election year, sent National Guardsmen to the school grounds to prevent the Little Rock Nine from entering the school. Town mobs encircled the nine black students, and state guardsmen blocked their paths with bayonets. In addition, segregationists such as the Mothers League and the White Citizens Councils telephoned Green and other families with midnight death threats. Finally, President Dwight Eisenhower took action to protect the students' rights, ordering 1,000 paratroopers to escort the students onto campus, where they successfully enrolled.

Stop Here & Discuss

- . What year did Ernest Green enroll at Central High School? Why did he want to enroll there?**
- Who were the Little Rock Nine?**
- Were the Little Rock Nine successful?**

Despite the protection of the federal troops, the Little Rock Nine were continual targets of white students' hatred. Throughout the school year, Green suffered numerous acts of discrimination. For example, he regularly had racial slurs directed at him in hallways. In the gym shower room, white boys flung steaming hot towels in his face, and even placed broken glass in the shower so that he cut his feet. Still, Green remained committed to the cause. When the Little Rock Nine met together during afternoons, Green, the eldest and only senior among the group, comforted his younger classmates, often using humor to distract them.

One incident that highlights Ernest Green's exceptional bravery occurred in January 1958. One school day just after lunch, Green and fellow black student Carlotta Walls were walking up the steps from the cafeteria when two white boys rushed up the steps behind them. Both boys had been previously involved with racial incidents, and one was a member of a white supremacist gang. The first boy tried to trip Carlotta, but she twisted aside, causing him to fall. The second boy punched Green twice in the face. Stunned, Green ran down the steps and chased the boy, who ran out of the school building. The boy tried to exit the building and then sneak back in through a cafeteria back door. However, Green called the attention of a federal guard who was stationed nearby. The guard caught the boy, and Green later identified him to a sergeant of the guards.

Stop Here & Discuss

- **What acts of discrimination did Green face over the course of the school year?**
- **How did Green respond to these acts of discrimination?**

Ernest Green's family and friends respected him for his level judgment, aura of calm assurance, and determination even in difficult circumstances. Although the expulsion of one of the Little Rock Nine discouraged Green, he completed his courses in May 1958. Death threats did not deter him from walking across the platform and receiving his diploma from Central High. Martin Luther King Jr. attended the graduation ceremony. The schools in Little Rock were changed forever. Following his lead, seven of the other students making up the Little Rock Nine successfully graduated from Central High. Their victory inspired other black students to integrate the schools, ultimately leading to widespread school desegregation throughout the South.

Information on Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks has been called the mother of the civil rights movement. Her acts of courage in fighting racial discrimination inspired ordinary citizens to begin the mass protest movement for African American civil rights. Parks was born Rosa Louise McCauley in 1913 in Tuskegee, Alabama. Her father was a carpenter and her mother, a teacher. She moved with her mother and brother to live with her grandmother in Pine Level, Alabama, when she was 2 years old. When she was 11 years old, Rosa entered a private school called Montgomery Industrial School for Girls. This school was funded by northern white women, and was set up to foster girls' self-worth. Rosa went on to attend Alabama Teachers College, married Raymond Parks, and then settled in Montgomery, Alabama. From the time she was young, Rosa was angered by the segregation (racial separation) in the South and the fear blacks felt of the Ku Klux Klan's violent night rides. Once she had completed her education, she became determined to fight for justice.

In 1943, Parks was arrested for boarding a city bus from the front, as only whites were allowed to do at the time. However, her arrest did little to deter Parks' struggle for civil rights. That same year, she was one of the few women to join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization that promoted African American civil rights. Through the NAACP, Parks arranged speakers' conferences, met national civil rights leaders, and led youth chapters of black children eager to gain equal rights. Parks' early activism and dignified character earned her the respect of many black leaders, but also hostility from whites who were hotly opposed to desegregation. When she brought black children to a racially integrated exhibit called the Freedom Train in the early 1950s, whites called her with death threats.

Stop Here & Discuss

- **What acts of discrimination did Parks face?**
- **How did she become involved in the civil rights movement?**

Rosa Parks' most famous civil rights action occurred on the evening of December 1, 1955. Parks boarded a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus after a long day's work as a department store seamstress. She sat in the last available seat, next to a black man and across the aisle from two black women, just behind the four whites-only rows at the front of the bus. When a white man boarded the bus, the driver, James F. Blake, twice told Parks' row to move so that the man could sit down. The three other blacks in Parks' row stood up and went to stand at the back of the bus. But Rosa Parks refused to move, determinedly holding her place. Blake called two nearby police officers to arrest her.

Parks was fingerprinted, fined \$14 for breaking the city's segregation laws, and locked in a jail cell for two hours until friends posted \$100 bond to release her. Afterward, instead of paying the fine, Parks, the Women's Political Council, and the NAACP filed a court case challenging the laws' constitutionality. In addition, they organized a massive bus boycott. Most of the city's black residents, even walk over 30 miles daily to and from work, refused to ride the segregated buses for over a year. In December 1956, 382 days after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, blacks won the right to ride in any seat on Montgomery city buses.

Stop Here & Discuss

- **What did Parks do on December 1, 1955?**
- **What was she arrested for?**
- **How did the black community protest bus segregation in Montgomery? What was the result?**

Parks' actions inspired thousands of other blacks to join the civil rights movement. They challenged racial segregation in restaurants, train stations, universities, and theaters. Following the Montgomery bus boycott, Parks received national fame. She traveled and gave speeches about the civil rights struggle and sometimes in support of black politicians' campaigns. She also continued to battle racial discrimination, violence, and poverty in her own Detroit neighborhood during the 1960s. Parks started assistance programs for poor children, even as she supported her ill husband who could not work. For her extraordinary commitment to African-American freedom, prominent politicians such as Jesse Jackson and Jimmy Carter honored Rosa Parks with degrees, speeches, and medals, and named schools and streets after her.

Stop Here & Discuss

- **What did Parks do after the Montgomery bus boycott?**

Information on Diane Nash

Diane Nash's enthusiasm and uncompromising militancy (vigorous support of a cause) made her a formidable civil rights worker. Nash (second from right in the picture) was born in 1938 and grew up a devout Catholic in Chicago, Illinois, and moved south in the late 1950s. Once there, Nash realized the grossly harmful effects segregation (racial separation) had on both blacks and whites. She was offended by restaurant owners telling her to "Go around to the back door where you belong." Nash decided to devote her life to the struggle for African American civil rights.

Nash's early involvement in the civil rights movement began when she was a student at Fisk University. She became involved in a sit-in demonstration at a whites-only lunch counter in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1959. She enthusiastically organized and participated in the sit-in movement throughout the 1960s. She and leaders such as John Lewis helped start the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC (pronounced "snick"), which led protests against segregation across the South. Nashville's student protesters, under Nash's leadership, learned how to dress, talk, and respond nonviolently to police and mob brutality. They quickly became the largest and most disciplined group of the black student protest movement of the 1960s. In fact, Nash became so well-known that southern court officials often asked defendants, "Do you know Diane Nash?" when trying to determine their level of involvement in the civil rights movement.

Stop Here & Discuss

- **Why did Diane Nash devote her life to the African-American struggle for civil rights?**
- **How did she and her followers protest segregation?**
- **How successful was Nash's leadership of student protesters?**

Nash inspired others not to compromise their fight for justice. At times she criticized civil rights leaders for seeking political recognition over genuine improvement for African Americans. She taught others go to jail, rather than cooperate with the system by paying what she deemed "guilty" bail fines. She readily applied her "jail, no bail" motto to herself, even going to prison when four months pregnant. With her gift of articulate speech and her model behavior, Nash inspired others to willingly give up their personal comforts and even their lives for racial justice. For example, when violence threatened to stop the freedom rides-demonstrations to desegregate interstate buses and bus terminals-Nash worked without sleep to keep the demonstration alive. She argued, "[Attacks are] exactly why the ride must not be stopped. If [segregationists] stop us with violence, the movement is dead."

Stop Here & Discuss

- **What did Nash inspire others to do?**
- **What was the purpose of her "jail, no bail" form of demonstration?**

One notable incident highlights Nash's spirit and leadership. In February 1961, nine students were arrested at a sit-in demonstration in a dime store in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Rather than pay a \$100 fine, the students chose to serve 30 days' hard labor on the road gang. They telephoned a gathering of SNCC leaders then meeting in New York to request SNCC support. Diane Nash was the first to volunteer to travel south and join the prisoners in jail. Three other SNCC workers agreed to join her, and together they drove to and sat down in the dime store in Rock Hill where the students had been arrested. They too were immediately arrested, and began serving their 30-day sentences. Once on the road gang, the students sang "We Shall Overcome" loudly each day at noon as they shoveled sand double-time. At first, the prison guards hated the groups' singing and laughing. But when even solitary confinement could not break the students' spirits, the guards eventually bragged to others about what good workers they were.

Nash's initiative to join other protesters in another state's jail inspired many more actions, and SNCC's influence as a national civil rights organization grew. Nashville students began to increase their demonstrations at local movie theaters. In Atlanta, Georgia, another 80 black college students willingly went to jail without posting bond. As a result of Nash's bravery, SNCC was better able to recruit volunteers willing to be involved in actions outside their home states. Nash was recognized with numerous honors from Martin Luther King Jr., President John F. Kennedy, and various universities for her unwavering dedication and effective leadership in the black freedom struggle.