

## HANDOUT TWO: LEADERSHIP INFLUENCES

### JUSTICE THURGOOD MARSHALL

Justice Thurgood Marshall was one of the most influential and important legal minds and lawyers in 20th century America, and for Bryan Stevenson, he was a legal inspiration. Born in Baltimore, Maryland on July 2, 1908, Justice Marshall was the grandson of an enslaved person who became the first African American to be appointed to the United States Supreme Court. After completing high school in 1925, he graduated from Lincoln University in Chester County, Pennsylvania. In 1930, he applied to the University of Maryland Law School, but was denied admission because he was African American. He sought admission and was accepted to Howard University Law School (HULS).

In 1933 Justice Marshall graduated as valedictorian of HULS and starting in 1938, he worked as an attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP.) In 1940, he became their chief counsel and founder of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund from 1934 - 1961. Justice Marshall argued thirty-two cases in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, more than any other American in history, creating a number of precedents leading to [Brown v. Board of Education](#) (1954) that overruled [Plessy v. Ferguson](#) (1896) and stated that “separate by equal” was unconstitutional in public schools nationwide.<sup>2</sup>

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy appointed Justice Marshall to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. In this capacity, he wrote over 150 decisions including support for the rights of immigrants, limiting government intrusion in cases involving illegal search and seizure, double jeopardy, and right to privacy issues. None of Justice Marshall’s 98 majority decisions were ever reversed by the Supreme Court.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Justice Marshall to the office of U.S. Solicitor General. In this role he won 14 of the 19 cases he argued before the Supreme Court on behalf of the government. In 1967, President Johnson nominated Justice Marshall to the United States Supreme Court where he served for twenty-four years.

Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall died on January 24, 1993.



“ I think it [*Brown v. Board*] mobilized African-Americans in ways that made the Montgomery bus boycott and all the civil rights activism that you saw throughout the 50s and 60s possible. There had to be some ally in an effort that was going to challenge racial hierarchy and white supremacy in the way that the civil rights community did. I think for a lot of people, that ally was believed to be the United States Supreme Court.

— BRYAN STEVENSON ”

2 The major cases leading up to Brown that were *Pearson v. Murray* (1936) that established in Maryland’s highest court that the University of Maryland School of Law could not exclude African Americans as Maryland had excluded Marshall just a few years earlier; *Missouri ex rel Gaines v. Canada* (1938) that held that Missouri could not exclude African Americans from the state law school since there was no comparable, and could be no comparable, school in Missouri for African Americans because of the unique intangibles of a legal education; *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) which declared separate but equal facilities for black professionals and graduate students in state universities unconstitutional. Ultimately this precedent was extended to other schools and ultimately down to public primary and secondary education in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

## MS. ROSA PARKS

Ms. Rosa Louise McCauley was born in Tuskegee, Alabama, on February 4, 1913. She grew up in Montgomery and was educated at the laboratory school of Alabama State College. In 1932, she married Mr. Raymond Parks, a barber and an activist who was a member of the NAACP. In 1943, she became Secretary of the Montgomery branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and two years later, she registered to vote, after twice being denied. By 1949, Ms. Parks was advisor to the local NAACP Youth Council and, under her guidance, youth members challenged the Jim Crow system by checking books out of whites-only libraries.

In August 1955 Ms. Parks travelled to Tennessee's Highlander Folk School to attend a workshop entitled "Racial Desegregation: Implementing the Supreme Court Decision." Several months later on December 1, 1955 Ms. Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama and was charged with violating Alabama's bus segregation laws. Other women would be arrested before December 1, 1955 for refusing to give up their seat on public transit, but Ms. Parks was chosen to represent this moment.<sup>3</sup> Ms. Parks's act of nonviolent resistance helped spark the Montgomery bus boycott, a 13-month struggle to desegregate the city's buses. Under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the boycott resulted in the enforcement of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that public bus segregation is unconstitutional.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the boycott and after its successful conclusion, Ms. Parks continued to face harassment and was forced to leave her home in Alabama and move to Detroit as opposition to the Civil Rights Movement grew.

In 1964 John Conyers, an African American lawyer, received Ms. Parks's endorsement of his campaign to represent Detroit in the U.S. House of Representatives. After he won, he hired Ms. Parks as an office assistant and she remained with him until her retirement in 1988. In 1987, she founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development which continues to provide learning and leadership opportunities for youth and seniors today. Until her death in October 2005 at the age of 92, Ms. Rosa Parks was an active supporter of civil rights causes.

Primary source documents, including Mrs. Parks's written recollections of her life, her involvement in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and subsequent arrest, are available at the [Library of Congress: Rosa Parks Papers Collection](#).

This biography of Rosa Parks is compiled from the [Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University](#). Read more about the planning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by the Montgomery Women's Council at: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/womens-political-council-wpc-montgomery>.



“

[Ms. Rosa Parks] was one of many people who, we used to sing this song saying, "Let nobody turn me around." It wasn't just rhetoric, it was real. When you spend time with people like that, Bernard Lafayette, CT Vivian, people who will tell you, "We were prepared to die for change," it gives you a sense of what kind of commitment it took to make things move. It wasn't casual. It wasn't comfortable. You couldn't do it just when the weather was good. You couldn't do it without fear that your life would be permanently altered. I learned a lot from people like that.

— BRYAN STEVENSON

”

<sup>3</sup> Claudette Colvin, Aurelia S. Browder, Susie McDonald and Mary Louise Smith are other women who were arrested for not giving up their seat on public transit.  
<sup>4</sup> <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/nov/13>

## CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

Congressman John Robery Lewis was born in Troy, Alabama in 1940 and grew up in an era of racial segregation. Elected to Congress in 1986 representing Georgia's 5th Congressional District, Congressman Lewis is one of the most respected and senior members of the House of Representatives today serving as the Chair of the United States House Ways and Means Committee on Oversight.

Congressman Lewis became actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement early on in life. Inspired by hearing Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. on the radio at home, Congressman Lewis left home in 1957 to attend the American Baptist Theological Seminary (ABT) in Nashville, Tennessee. Congressman Lewis became more active in the Civil Rights Movement at ABT participating in the nonviolent sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in Nashville and helping to establish the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). After graduation, Congressman Lewis participated in the Freedom Ride of 1961. Organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Freedom Ride sent black and white passengers on buses into the South to test the desegregation in interstate transportation facilities decided by the Supreme Court decision in [Boydton v. Virginia](#).<sup>6</sup>

In 1963, he was elected as chairman of SNCC and, at the age of 23, was the youngest leader to have spoken at the March on Washington. One year later he was one of the architects of Freedom Summer including leading the first march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, on March 7, 1965. He left his position in SNCC in 1966 and worked for the Voter Education Project until running for Atlanta City Council in 1981 and in 1986 was elected to the House of Representatives. Congressman John Lewis has been awarded fourteen honorary degrees, numerous honors for his leadership and courage, authored a three-part graphic novel titled *March* that was awarded the National Book Award, and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 from President Barack Obama.

<sup>5</sup> Excerpted from Kunhardt Film interviews conducted in the making of True Justice.  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1960/7>



“

I think that there is something honorable about doing justice work. . . People sometimes say to me, “Oh, it must be overwhelming and difficult to represent people on death row, to be fighting against a system,” and it is. But when I feel overwhelmed, I go into the conference room and I look out the window, and I think about the people who were working here, who were sitting here 60 years ago trying to just create more justice. Who frequently had to say, “My head is bloodied, but not bowed.” That’s what John Lewis had to say, and yet they persisted. . . appreciating that and thinking about that is really important.”<sup>5</sup>

— BRYAN STEVENSON

”

