

Scott Jones  
Constitutional History Independent Study

Rowan, Carl T. *Dream Makers, Dream Breakers: The World of Justice Thurgood Marshall*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993). 475 pages.

Sometimes in the study of history the role of one man or woman can have tremendous impact on the times and can actually change the course of history. For the civil rights for black Americans in the latter half of the twentieth century that person is Thurgood Marshall. From his work in the early formations in the NAACP, his role in the famous *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, KS*, and then his role as the first black justice on the United States Supreme Court, Marshall fought to gain equal status in the American society for black Americans. However, what has often been lost in the discussions of Marshall's career and life was his true passion for all Americans to be treated equally. Carl T. Rowan's *Dream Makers, Dream Breakers* is not only a study in the life of Marshall, but also a study of the person who changed the course of a people. To Rowan, Marshall should be a hero to all Americans, not just to black Americans and tries to show why throughout his book.

Of course, no book on Thurgood Marshall would be acceptable without a portrayal of his work to end segregation of races in the United States. Rowan relies extensively on interviews with people who knew Marshall and Marshall himself to recreate Marshall's formative years to the reader. The result is the story of a man who had discrimination all around him. To Rowan the key event in Marshall's development was University of Maryland Law School's rejection of his application because he was a black man. Upset, Marshall chose to go to Howard University to attain his law degree and begin his lifelong fight to end discrimination in America. From that point, Marshall

focuses his effort to end segregation of schools, particularly the University of Maryland. The culmination of that fight was the famous 1954 Brown case in which Marshall was the lead counsel for the NAACP before the Supreme Court.

The story then continues to his 1967 appointment to the Supreme Court of the United States. At this point, Rowan's book changes focus from a history of the legal battle to end segregation, to a step-by-step account of why Marshall should be a hero to all Americans. Rowan portrays Marshall as a leader of a nonviolent revolution of the courts. Rowan argues that Marshall based his decisions on the right of free citizens (i.e., all Americans) to be guaranteed equality under the law. Rowan portrays Marshall as a staunch defender of a woman's right to have an abortion, a believer that no force should ever be used to gain a confession from an accused criminal, and a defender a privacy rights. According to Rowan, these make Marshall a great supporter of the rights of the common man and woman of America, not just a supporter of black rights.

Rowan brings his book to a close with a discussion with a retired Marshall over the questions facing the country today. From these opinions, the reader senses that Marshall still defends his idea of the Constitution with all the energy in his body. Even in retirement, Marshall still gathered controversy. Rowan asked Marshall about the Clarence Thomas nomination to the Court hearings and Marshall replied that the incident still shows the lack of unity among the black race. This is an interesting statement from a man who thrived on having a differing opinion from the rest of the country in the segregation cases of the 1940s and 1950s.

No one can ever deny Marshall his rightful place in the history books. While he received death threats and endured much public scrutiny, Marshall never backed down

from his dream of what he thought country should look like. Rowan states in his book that Marshall is an example of the United States being a nation of great people not just a nation of laws. As long as the United States continues to produce people with the passion of Thurgood Marshall, things will be just fine.