

PREFACE

Andrew Young*

It was 1941, in a federal courtroom in New Orleans. My sixth-grade class from Valena C. Jones School was there to study the judicial process, and we were observing the proceedings in a landmark case. A black lawyer was arguing for equalization of black and white teacher salaries. He was Thurgood Marshall.

The experience had a lasting impact on my life. Here was a black lawyer fighting in the courts for the rights of black people, working toward another victory in the struggle for racial equality. It was an unforgettable inspiration.

It was also a historic moment, one that all too few of us understand. The 1930s and 1940s are often thought of as a period of inactivity in the black struggle. Yet it was during those years that Thurgood Marshall and such colleagues as William Hastie, Spottswood Robinson and Constance Motley were beginning to win legal battles that established the basis for the mass movement which was to come later.

Thurgood Marshall participated in a long series of cases which were forerunners of the mass movement. There were, for instance, the *Heman Sweatt* case (integrating a law school in Texas), desegregation of dining cars, desegregation of interstate travel (a case which led to the Freedom Rides), desegregation of the buses in Montgomery, and, of course the school desegregation cases.

There were times in the civil rights movement when we relied on Thurgood Marshall's legal strategy in order to stay out of jail and continue demonstrations.

The movement sought to implement the rights of black people to desegregation and to the vote. It was Thurgood Marshall and his associates however, who were responsible for the recognition by the Supreme Court that black people were being denied their constitutional rights. And it was their achievements in the courts that inspired our mass movement and protected and consolidated the gains we made.

The history of black people in America has been filled with drama and suffering and moral leadership and momentous change since that day in 1941 when I saw Thurgood Marshall pleading a case in federal court in New Orleans. His presence that day was critical to the shaping of the course of my own life.

That is why I was so proud on January 30, 1977, when Justice Thurgood Marshall of the Supreme Court of the United States came to the White House in Washington to administer the oath of office to me as United States Ambassador to the United Nations.

If we all work to preserve the legal standards he set, the rights he helped to guarantee, and the values he fought for, we will have honored Justice Marshall, and we will have contributed to the building of a better country

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