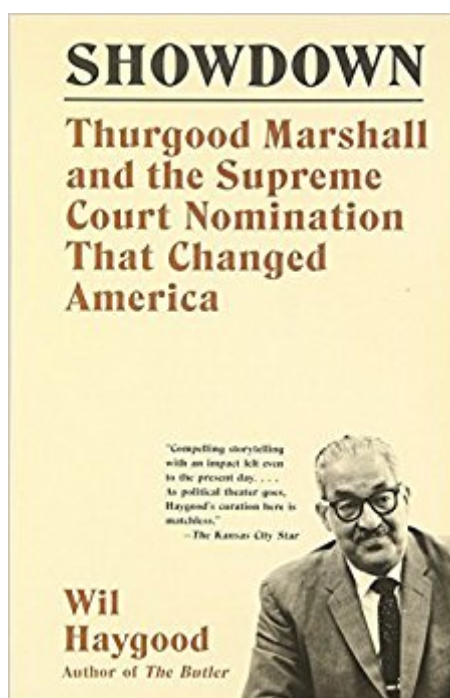


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# Showdown: Thurgood Marshall And The Supreme Court Nomination That Changed America



## Synopsis

Over the course of his forty-year career, Thurgood Marshall brought down the separate-but-equal doctrine, integrated schools, and not only fought for human rights and human dignity but also made them impossible to deny in the courts and in the streets. In this galvanizing biography, award-winning author Wil Haygood uses the framework of the dramatic, contentious five-day Senate hearing to confirm Marshall as the first African-American Supreme Court justice, to weave a provocative and moving look at Marshall's life as well as at the politicians, lawyers, activists, and others who shaped or desperately tried to stop the civil rights movement. An authoritative account of one of the most transformative justices of the twentieth century, *Showdown* makes clear that it is impossible to overestimate Thurgood Marshall's lasting influence on the racial politics of our nation.

## Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (August 9, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307947378

ISBN-13: 978-0307947376

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 74 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #109,106 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #50 in Books > Law >

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Academics > Lawyers & Judges #580 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable

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## Customer Reviews

Winner of an Ohioana Book Award, the Scribes Book Award, and a BCALA Literary Award Finalist for an NAACP Image Award, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, an Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence, and the Benjamin Hooks National Book Award One of the Best Books of the Year The Washington Post NPR The Boston Globe Minneapolis Star Tribune Booklist Baltimore magazine New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice A Columbus READS: One City, One Book pick "A vivid portrait." The Boston Globe "A richly textured

account. . . . If the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was the civil rights movement's brightest star, Thurgood Marshall was its unsung hero. • Los Angeles Times

"Haygood is a master of the ticktock narrative. He's equally adept at contextualizing the showdown that gives his book its title, explaining how some of Marshall's detractors hoped that resentment linked to recent urban riots would help them derail his nomination. His prose, meanwhile, is a consistent pleasure. • Minneapolis Star Tribune

"Gripping . . . [Showdown] provides valuable reminders about the civil rights revolution of the 1960s and the truly mind-boggling horrors that precipitated nation-changing events. • The Dallas Morning News

"Compelling storytelling with an impact felt even to the present day. . . . As political theater goes, Haygood's curation here is matchless. • Kansas City Star

"Wil Haygood's engaging Showdown make[s] clear that even if Thurgood Marshall had not made it into history books as the first African American to sit on the Supreme Court of the United States, he would have deserved a place in American history as one of the best, most effective lawyers of his generation. • The Washington Post

"Important and gripping. . . . A vivid examination of a pivotal moment in the nation's racial history. . . . With a reporter's eye for the telling detail, [Haygood] describes with passion myriad horrors spawned by violent racism as well as the numerous examples of courage that inspired Marshall on his journey. • Richmond Times-Dispatch

"Haygood rehabilitates Marshall with Showdown. . . . [His] decision to focus on this turning point in Marshall's life proves ingenious. • The Atlantic

"An inspiring story of America's moral strength, powerfully told with exquisite attention to evocative detail. • David K. Shipler, author of A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America

"The compelling story of a true American hero. • San Jose Mercury News

"Haygood expertly brings [a] remarkable time and place back to life. . . . He's especially skilled at helping readers understand the personalities and motives of the men and they're all men who sought victory at the hearings. • Christian Science Monitor

"The choice of Thurgood Marshall was an event that changed the history of America, and this book proves that the changes were all positive. • President Jimmy Carter

"A window into the history of the civil rights struggle and the path taken by one of its giants. • Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"Haygood has made an important contribution to American history by reminding us of this outstanding individual at a pivotal time in black-white relations." • The

Missourian

“Showdown reveals the drama of competing currents in our history as they came to a head during 1967—a time like the present filled with rebellion, violence, desperation and social progress.”

•Congressman Elijah Cummings

“Haygood does a terrific job of keeping the Judiciary Committee proceedings suspenseful. . . This compelling aria at last has been sung.”

•Los Angeles Review of Books

“An elegant, fascinating, and important tale, rendered with relentless originality and the author’s superb gift of portraiture.”

•Michael Beschloss

“The best kind of narrative history. The story line is taut, the characters are complex, and the backdrop is finely drawn.”

•Columbus Free Press

“Haygood’s vivid account of the confrontation between Thurgood Marshall and Southern segregationist oligarchs in the U.S. Senate resurrects a civil rights drama often overlooked in histories of the storm of events during the 1960s.”

•Curtis Wilkie, author of *Dixie: A personal Odyssey Through Events That Shaped the Modern South*

“A fascinating account of Marshall’s extraordinary journey to the Supreme Court, a candid reflection on the people and events that shaped Marshall’s journey, and a book that captures the reader’s attention with one interesting anecdote or revelation after the next.”

•Finger Lake Times

“You wouldn’t expect a nonfiction book about the usually cut-and-dried process of hearings on a judicial appointment to pack the drama and intrigue of a John Grisham legal thriller. But Wil Haygood’s Showdown does just that.”

•Ohioana Quarterly

Wil Haygood is currently the Boadway Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence in the department of media, journalism, and film at Miami University, Ohio. For nearly three decades he was a journalist, serving as a national and foreign correspondent at The Boston Globe, where he was a Pulitzer Prize finalist, and then at The Washington Post, where he wrote the story “A Butler Well Served by This Election,” which became the basis for the award-winning motion picture *The Butler*, directed by Lee Daniels. Haygood’s book *The Butler: A Witness to History* has been translated into a dozen foreign languages. For his work on *Showdown*, Haygood was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship. His biographies of Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Sammy Davis Jr., and Sugar Ray Robinson have all garnered wide acclaim.

Before there were Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Barack Obama, there was

Thurgood Marshall. In countless ways, he was braver than all the racial pioneers who followed him and arguably as brave or braver still than those who broke racial and social barriers before him. He is very much lost in the current political landscape with the re-emergence of racial politics as exhibited in the Donald Trump candidacy and the voter suppression movement rampant in the land. His name is hardly mentioned by the current generation of leaders and their followers. After all, he died nearly two decades ago. Author Wil Haygood, who also penned the book *The Butler*, which became a hit movie, has powerfully reminded us of Mr. Justice Marshall and how this lifelong trial lawyer became the first African American to serve on the Supreme Court. Every American in this so-called Year of Trump should be required to read this book. If they do, and most will not read it, they either will learn afresh or for the first time about the vast racial divide that existed in this country and, to some extent, remains. The book graphically explains how far the country came from the lynch mob that killed black citizens without fear of legal consequences to the summer of 1967, when President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Mr. Marshall to the Supreme Court. The author is a skilled storyteller and packs an immense and on-the-edge-of-the-seat drama into events surrounding the nomination even when the reader knows the outcome. His portraits of the players in this drama and its handful of days of public confirmation hearings are worth the price of the book. There are vivid portraits not only of the major figures in the drama, but also of lesser players, such as J. Waites Waring, the proud scion of a Charleston, S.C., family who literally was exiled to New York City after he, as a federal judge, dared to begin giving blacks the rights guaranteed in the Constitution. The last straw for him probably came when he divorced his first wife and he and his new wife entertained Negroes at their Charleston home, not far from where slaveholders once traded human flesh as if it were a meat market. The Marshall nomination, among so many things it represented, pitted the "Old Bulls" on the Senate Judiciary Committee against the "Young Turks" on the panel that was charged with conducting the confirmation hearings and sending a recommendation to the full Senate. The book reintroduced this editor to such Old Bulls as Sens. John J. McClellan, James O. Eastland, Strom Thurmond, and Sam J. Ervin. The editor knew Senator Ervin, who later redeemed his reputation by chairing the Senate Select Committee on Watergate, and on occasion escorted him around Asheville, N.C. This group was intent on blocking the Marshall nomination and, in their eyes and in the eyes of their supporters, "preserve the Southern way of life." They saw in Thurgood Marshall, the attorney who had successfully argued the *Brown v. Board* school integration case before the Supreme Court in the decade prior to his nomination to the court, as an activist judge who would further destroy the Southern way of life. That

way of life, make no doubt, was to keep Negroes in their place, to keep them as second-and third-class citizens, to deny them full equality of the law as promised by the Constitution. It was this culture that Thurgood Marshall, brought up in a middle-class black Baltimore family, had fought against all of his adult life in behalf of the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund. What truly impressed this editor about the nominee was the breath of his legal experience and his courage. He risked his life time after time to fight discrimination in such places as Florida, Texas, South Carolina, and other states in the former Confederacy. He got Negroes admitted to previous all-white universities. He secured the vote for blacks in such places as Texas. He successfully kept falsely accused African Americans from being executed. He won the Supreme Court case that ended the separate-but-equal doctrine that made the nation's public schools separate but unequal. For a black man, even a large and bon vivant man such as Thurgood Marshall, to step into such charged racial situations and confront Southern sheriffs, judges and juries is a deed to behold even from the distance 60 or 70 years. Most Americans, especially white Americans, cannot even to this day grasp the bravery required of such an achievement. Mr. Marshall across his long years of litigating seemed to take it all in stride, though those close to him saw that the pressures at times drained him. If he is largely unknown to the current generation of Americans, so is the rule by lynch mob that existed in this country into the 1960s. This book brings that violent era back to life, retelling time and again about how the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Councils took law and order into their own hands. One scene in the book is especially memorable. It retells how a mob lynched an innocent black falsely accused of raping a white woman. The mob cut off his body parts, including ears and penis, before hanging him. These people were ISIS long before ISIS existed. The dramas of the lives of Thurgood Marshall, Lyndon Johnson, the Old Bulls and the Young Turks are vividly portrayed before the catharsis arrives in Room 2228 of the New Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C., on July 13, 1967 and the days that followed. The Old Bulls tried to link the nominee to communists and the violence in the streets of the day. It was at the height of the Vietnam War and race riots in such cities of Detroit and Tampa. Mr. Marshall's opponents did this despite a report from J. Edgar Hoover's FBI that there was no link between the nominee and communists. (Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hoover, incidentally, got along fine and had at least respect for each other, despite the fact that FBI agents wiretapped such civil rights leaders as Dr. King.) The Old Bulls, some of whom had racial skeletons their closets, also tried to give the impression that the nominee for the highest court in the land was too ignorant to serve. He was hit with arcane questions from Senator Thurmond about what committee authored constitutional amendments. The senator wanted Judge Marshall (he was sitting on an appellate

court) to tell him who the members of the ancient committees were. It was as if the nominee was being submitted to a literacy test as a rite of judicial passage. When, at last, the nominee turned the tables on Senator Thurmond by asking him to name the committee members, the South Carolinian had to get an aide for return to his Senate office and locate the names. Only a president steeped in the ways of the Senate, as was Lyndon Johnson, could have gotten this nomination confirmed. He knew the Southerners on the committee and in the fuller Senate would never vote for confirmation. So he lobbied them to not vote, giving them the excuse back home that they really voted against a black man appointed to the Supreme Court. The president also knew that if confirmation gained fewer than 60 votes that the Southern segregationists, especially Senator Thurmond, could launch a filibuster to kill the nomination. In the end, the Young Turks such as Senators Joseph Tydings, Philip Hart, Edward Kennedy, and Birch Bayh triumphed. Senator Hart, of Michigan, who had fought against racial discrimination his entire career, led the group. The group also was backed by some Republicans, principally Sen. Everett M. Dirksen, of Illinois. He kept the avatar of the Party of Lincoln alive in the shadows of the darkness that surrounded it from the Democratic Southern segregationists. Within a year or less, Senator Dirksen, who had been instrumental also in helping LBJ to pass the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and his GOP would be cursed with Richard M. Nixon's "Southern Strategy," a code phrase for racial discrimination in the South. The curse eventually would poison the entire Republican Party and be at least partly responsible for the rise of Donald Trump as the Republican presidential nominee in 2016. When the Young Turks, Judge Marshall and the President triumphed in the Senate, Senator Hart and others shed tears of joy. A deep racial divide had been closed, but they knew still more chasms were ahead. The Marshall nomination, if sent to the U.S. Senate today, never would make it to confirmation. There is not a Republican in the lot of the Senate GOP with the stature and statesmanship possessed by Everett Dirksen. President Obama's current Supreme Court nominee, Merrick Garland, who is white, languishes because Senate Republicans, led by Mitch McConnell, are obstructionists in the disreputable tradition of McClellan, Eastland, Thurmond and Ervin. The racial politics this time is only different from that exhibited against Thurgood Marshall because the president who made the nomination happens to be black. The old cliché is as true as ever: "The more things change, the more they stay the same." If you read no other book this year, read "Showdown." It will inspire you and make you understand the real meaning of American democracy.

Having read Haygood's excellent book on Sammy Davis Jr. (whom I would not

have expected to interest me), I came to this story with high expectations that were entirely fulfilled. This story is almost electric in its impact, captivating from start to finish. Thurgood Marshall was a giant, an indefatigable advocate for the downtrodden, and his lifelong work to improve the lot of his brothers comes through in Haygood's well-told story. Marshall, LBJ, the background of the civil rights struggle, the efforts of racist Southern senators to block the nomination--it's a great story that echoes today as obstructionist, backward-thinking politicians try to stall President Obama's effort to name a justice to the Court.

The book was interesting to read. Thurgood Marshall was a superb lawyer, who was instrumental in bringing about long overdue changes in the nation and the law. The story of his nomination to SCOTUS and the ugly confirmation battle is a story that needs to be told. One can only guess how accurately this book tells it, because the book contains so many errors of simple facts, that its credibility on larger matters is doubtful. As one example, within the same paragraph, the book asserts that 60 votes were needed to stop a filibuster, and that 67 votes were needed.

A fascinating review of the process and the characters involved in opposing and supporting the nomination of Thurgood Marshall by President Johnson. At the time, I was so engrossed in my own struggle to get through college that I didn't appreciate the bitterness of the opposition from the Deep South and the racial divide still existing despite, or because of, the Passage of the Civil Rights act and the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. The Board of Education. This should be a required read for those who don't appreciate or understand the tension between races during that time or currently.

An extraordinary book about an extraordinary man. The narrative on the confirmation hearings is gripping stuff, and reminds the Watergate generation that Sam Ervin had less than a heroic past. The book also attests to the political courage of Lyndon Johnson, whose commitment to the eradication of structural racism was unsurpassed in the 20th Century. The book reminds the readers that great men -- and, yes, sadly, they were all men -- once fought for justice in the Senate with eloquence and integrity -- where have you gone Phil Hart, the Nation turns its lonely eyes to you?

LBJ and Thurgood Marshall were giants of the 20th century. How LBJ was able to get Marshall appointed despite southern resistance is a compelling story.



The book provides valuable insights how Marshall used the American constitution to fight segregation in the South and how he succeeded against all odds in many small law suits as well as the big one " Brown vs Board of Education " that ended legal school segregation in the South. It also describes his adversaries, mostly Southern Senators who fiercely opposed him. Against this background, the author describes the actual hearings in the Senate and Senator Ervin and others during the actual hearings. Fascinating, well written and very informative about our recent racist psast that may not be so past....

Wow, what an amazing book. I lived through the era and there are so many things I didn't know. Well written.

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