

# A Salute to Justice Thurgood Marshall

from the  
**Civil Rights Journal**  
News Service of the United Church of Christ  
Commission for Racial Justice



Justice Thurgood Marshall

He is like the old soldier who has fought many a war and is now coming back for one more, necessary battle. Such is the image of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, a man who, in the sunset of his years, has shown that plain, outspoken courage is not just the purview of the young.

The Reagan Administration had hoped to use the Constitution's bicentennial to enshrine and therefore to stagnate that document. The Constitution, thus deified, was to become yet another tool in Reagan's attempt to illegitimize the progressive gains made before Reagan took office. But this was not to be. Justice Marshall, the lone African American on the highest bench in the land, saw to that. While President Reagan and his cohort, former Chief Justice Warren Burger, praised the Constitution as a perfect document and its framers as "giants," Thurgood Marshall brought a little reality to the situation.

In a recent speech Justice Marshall noted that he did

not, "find the wisdom, foresight, and sense of justice exhibited by the Framers particularly profound. To the contrary," he added, "the government they devised was defective from the start... When contemporary Americans cite 'The Constitution,' they invoke a concept that is vastly different from what the Framers barely began to construct two centuries ago." One of the defects to which Marshall was referring was the matter of slavery, a subject which Reagan carefully omits in his speeches. And so he must. For by discussing the imperfections of the Constitution, Reagan would also have to

admit that a strict interpretation of the Constitution would put African Americans back in chains. As Justice Marshall reminds us. "Moral principles against slavery, for those who had them, were comprised."

One of the reasons this country has never been fully exercised of its racism is that it never truly admitted the racist underpinning upon which this country was built. You cannot repair a wrong until you have admitted it. By revealing the flaws in the lofty, yet imperfect, Constitution, Justice Marshall has validated the continuing struggle for change that will make that document truly democratic. As he himself

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## New Freedom Bell in Las Vegas June 19

The sounds of liberty will ring out in Southern Nevada on Friday, June 19, as the New Freedom Bell, a replica of the Liberty Bell, stops in

notes, the credit for progressive change in this country "... does not belong to the Framers. It belongs to those who refused to acquiesce in outdated notions of 'liberty,' 'justice,' and 'equality,' and who strived to better them. The true miracle was not the birth of the Constitution, but its life, a life nurtured through two turbulent centuries of our own making."

Justice Marshall has reminded us that the rights of the oppressed should never be sacrificed for the so-called greater good of maintaining order or political cohesion. This country has yet to repent for slavery and until it does, we will continue to reap harvest after harvest of racial turmoil.

We salute Thurgood Marshall for his valiant continued efforts towards the cause of justice for all people.

Las Vegas as part of a 30 city journey across the United States.

The cast iron bell, forged at the original foundry in London that produced the Liberty Bell, was commissioned by Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai of America, a lay Buddhist organization, as a symbol of respect for the past and hope for the future and to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the United States Constitution. The bell stands six and one half feet tall and weighs two tons.

Ceremonies will be held at noon at the Las Vegas Downtown Transportation Center, with the Honorable Ron Lurie, Mayor of Las Vegas, proclaiming Friday, June 19, 1987 as "NSA FREEDOM DAY" in Las Vegas. The ceremony is open to the public and everyone will be able to take pictures, ring the Freedom Bell and add their signatures in support of the nationwide effort to collect over 200,000 signatures for the "We The People 200" campaign that is sponsoring

the American Constitution Celebration in Philadelphia, where NSA will hold a spectacular series of events over the July Fourth weekend to celebrate the Bicentennial of the American Constitution.

George M. Williams, General Director of NSA, explained the significance of the event: "The New Freedom Bell is meant to reawaken every American to the spirit of the Founding Fathers of America... who pursued and accomplished the establishment of liberty for all in this nation and to encourage Americans to solidify the foundation of hope, courage, and confidence towards a peaceful world in the twenty-first century."

The Freedom Bell will depart Las Vegas at 3 p.m. en route to Phoenix, Arizona, after a brief stop at Hoover Dam for a photo session with officials.

For further information, contact Barbara Dempsey at 452-2320 or 368-2145.

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