

Thurgood Marshall on Equality

Our government is based on the principle of the equality of man the individual, not the group. All of us can quote the principle that "All men are created equal." Our basic legal document, the Constitution of the United States, guarantees equal protection of the laws to all of us. Many state constitutions have similar provisions. We even have a "Bill of Rights" in the Constitution of Louisiana. These high-sounding principles we preach and teach. However, in the eyes of the world, we stand convicted of violating these principles day in and day out.

Today, one hundred and seventy-seven years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and eighty-six years after the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted, we have a society where, in varying degrees throughout the country, but especially in the South, Negroes, solely because they are Negroes, are segregated, ostracized and set apart from all other Americans. This discrimination extends from the cradle to the graveyard. (And I emphasize graveyard, rather than grave.) Or, to put it even more bluntly, in many areas of this country, a white paroled murderer would be welcome in places which would at the same time exclude such people as Ralph Bunche, Marian Anderson, Jackie Robinson and many others. Constitutionally protected individual rights have been effectively destroyed by outmoded theories of racial or group inferiority.... How long can we afford the luxury of segregation and discrimination?

Thurgood Marshall, "Excerpts from the Edwin Rogers Embree Memorial Lectures of Thurgood Marshall," presented at Dillard University, Spring 1954, New Orleans, in Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, eds. *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform and Renewal* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999).