

Athenians were persuaded by their ambitious leaders to overreach. Athens did not disappear after the fifth century: Plato was not yet 30 years old at century's end, and Aristotle had not been born. But henceforth, and to this day, the city would matter for the might of its mind.

—James Morris

### **THURGOOD MARSHALL:**

#### ***American Revolutionary.***

By Juan Williams. Times Books. 459

pp. \$27.50

In the latest addition to the substantial literature on the first black Supreme Court justice, Williams charts Marshall's transformation from a child of rather humble but middle-class origins (his mother was a schoolteacher, his father a steward at an all-white yacht club) into an "American Revolutionary" honored by blacks as "Mr. Civil Rights." Spurred on by his mother's unwavering support and reoriented (temporarily) from parties to studies in college, Marshall found his life's focus under a hard-driving Howard Law School mentor, Charles Houston. Houston drew Marshall into NAACP work in the deep South, immersing him in the fight against the white primary, lynching, segregated transportation, restrictive covenants, and school segregation. It all culminated in Marshall's triumph in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), in which the Supreme Court unanimously declared that segregated public education violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Marshall was rewarded for his accomplishments, first with a federal judgeship in 1961 and then with a place on the Supreme Court in 1967.

As the years passed, though, Marshall became increasingly bitter. He lamented the civil rights movement's shift from law to other tools of reform. He bridled not only at Black Power militants but, privately, at the nonviolent protests of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well. Later, the growing conservatism of the Court and the White House seemed to seal Marshall's view that the country had breached the promise of the civil rights revolution.

Williams provides a lively and readable introduction to the justice's personal and professional life, drawing on Marshall's correspondence, other primary documents, and extensive interviews (but, surprisingly, neglecting the existing literature on Marshall and the civil rights movement). A *Washington Post* journalist and the author of the book companion to the PBS documentary *Eyes on*

*the Prize*, Williams proceeds case by case through Marshall's extensive legal career, offering helpful summaries but little sustained analysis of the justice's brand of civil rights activism.

In the final chapter, the author suggests that Marshall's approach rested on a belief that individual rights are paramount. How did this philosophy affect other aspects of Marshall's life, such as his personal indulgence or his distaste for King? Williams never says. His thin rendering of Marshall's beliefs also fails to account for the justice's descent into bitter isolation, given his legendary successes. While Williams depicts Marshall as a straightforward believer in individual

rights, the evidence points toward some more strained individualistic ethos that emphasized the personal dimension of offense and grievance, individual rights and redress, law as the only solution to

social wrongs, and the autonomous nature of human achievement—not all of which are easily reconciled with the collectivist underpinnings of civil rights and social life more generally. The author provides the details of Justice Marshall's life without fully reflecting on its ultimate meaning and trajectory.



—Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn

### **THE BRITISH MONARCHY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.**

By Marilyn Morris. Yale Univ. Press.

229 pp. \$28.50

As French revolutionaries toppled the Bourbon monarchy, many Britons, including Edmund Burke and Edward Gibbon, worried that their throne might be next. For the British crown, the 18th century had not been the best of times. Jacobites, supporters of the Stuart pretenders, incited rebellions in 1714 and 1745. During their collective reigns (1714–60), George I and George II proved altogether inept at public relations, and they were frequently subjected to satirical attacks. George III lost the American colonies, a defeat that left him so despon-