

# John Marshall

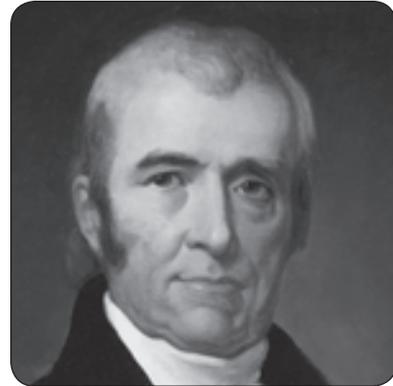
1755–1835



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** John Marshall was the fourth chief justice of the Supreme Court. He strengthened the Supreme Court and helped make it what it is today.



*As you read the biography below, think about how John Marshall's vision of the United States was carried out in his reforms of the Supreme Court.*



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Although he had almost no formal education and had studied law for only six weeks, John Marshall became one of the most important justices ever to sit on the Supreme Court.

John Marshall was born in Virginia in 1755, the first in a family of 15 children. His father was a friend of George Washington, and his mother was related to Thomas Jefferson. During the Revolutionary War, Marshall and his father both fought and served under General Washington. This experience shaped Marshall's future as a loyal patriot of the United States.

After his military service, Marshall studied law briefly. In 1780, he was appointed to the Virginia state legislature, where he served until 1797. He then served in the U.S. House of Representatives and was secretary of state under President John Adams.

In 1801, President Adams appointed Marshall to be chief justice of the Supreme Court. At the time, the Supreme Court didn't have its own offices and had to meet in a small room in the basement of the Capitol. The Court did not have much power, but that would change under Marshall's tenure.

## VOCABULARY

**Federalist** supporter of the Federalist Party; believer in a strong national government

**judicial review** the Supreme Court's power to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional

As chief justice, Marshall transformed the Supreme Court into the governmental body responsible for interpreting the Constitution. He also increased the authority of the Supreme Court, putting the judicial branch on an equal footing with the executive and legislative branches.

John Marshall was a **Federalist**. He believed the United States needed a strong, central government. This idea drove Marshall to make some of the reforms that he did. Under Marshall, the Supreme Court ruled that Congress had implied powers, which meant powers that were not specifically stated in the Constitution. Marshall also strengthened the federal government by ruling that federal law overruled state law.

Perhaps Marshall's most important decision was in the case of *Marbury v. Madison* (1803). His ruling established the power of **judicial review**, which allows the Supreme Court to declare an act of Congress unconstitutional, and therefore no longer in force.

John Marshall died in 1835, still serving as chief justice. He held this position for 34 years, longer than any other chief justice before him or since.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What kinds of reforms did John Marshall make to the Supreme Court?

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2. **Analyze** What might have driven John Marshall to make the changes that he did?

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### ACTIVITY

3. Think about what you have read about John Marshall, his patriotism, and his devotion to American justice. Use magazine clippings and construction paper to make a collage of the U.S. flag.