

Files: Marshall sought FBI help on Communists

4/3/96
WASHINGTON (AP) - Civil rights leader Thurgood Marshall was so worried in the 1950s about Communist Party efforts to infiltrate and influence the NAACP that he turned to the FBI for advice, newly released agency files indicate.

"The matter which is worrying him more than anything else right at the moment is the Communist Party's effort to get into the NAACP and forge out to the forefront," said a 1952 memo by Louis B. Nichols, assistant to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

Marshall, at times a forceful critic of the FBI in those years, had traveled to Washington from New York City for a meeting with Nichols after asking unsuccessfully to meet with Hoover.

Marshall, who was to become the first black Supreme Court justice in 1967, was general counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at the time.

He died in 1993, two years after poor health forced him to retire from the nation's highest court.

A longtime crusader for racial justice, Marshall was linked in FBI reports of the 1940s and early 1950s to organizations such as the National Lawyer's Guild, then considered a Communist front.

The allegations had a long life. When Marshall was nominated by

President Johnson to the Supreme Court, Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., wrote to Hoover to ask whether reports linking Marshall to Communist groups were true.

The 1,200 pages of FBI files on Marshall include episodes in which he attacked the agency's diligence in investigating crimes against black victims, and instances in which he sought its guidance.

In a 1946 letter to then-Attorney General Tom Clark, Marshall questioned the FBI's performance in probing race riots in Columbia, Tenn.; lynchings in Minden, La., and the beating of a black man in Batesburg, S.C.

"Such a record demonstrates the uneven administration of federal criminal statutes, which should not be tolerated," Marshall told Clark.