

A Brief History on the Life and Legacy of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legacy as a justice of the United States Supreme Court will last far beyond her unfortunate passing earlier this year, on September 18, 2020. Ginsburg's legacy encompasses her entire career, which began well before her appointment to the Supreme Court. Her early work is underscored with her passion for equality, which continued throughout her entire career.

Ginsburg entered the public eye back in the 1970s as a highly educated lawyer. Despite her gender, she was able to attend Harvard and Columbia Law and graduated at the top of her classes. She taught law at Rutgers University from 1963 to 1972 and co-founded the Women's Rights Law Reporter in 1970, which was the United States' first legal journal about women's rights. In 1972 after leaving Rutgers, Ginsburg began to teach at Columbia and founded the Women's Rights Project of the ACLU. During this time, Ginsburg argued hundreds of gender discrimination cases and even took six cases to the Supreme Court. She won five of these six cases, and each time, she worked to increase legal protections in the constitution for women and minority groups. Ginsburg's career as a lawyer continued until she was appointed as a judge of the District of Columbia Circuit.

Justice Ginsburg entered the judicial spotlight in 1980 when then-President Carter nominated her for the District of Columbia Circuit. This catapulted her legal career, and she made history with her appointment to the Supreme Court in 1993 by Bill Clinton, where she continued to serve until she passed earlier this year. During her incredible 27-year tenure as a Supreme Court Justice, Ginsburg inspired millions of women with her courage in the struggle for gender equality that has spanned generations. Justice Ginsburg was also a strong ally of LGBTQ+ rights and sought equality for all throughout her career. Her memory will continue to live on and inspire many more people that are standing in opposition to institutionalized inequality today. One of Justice Ginsburg's most notable and influential—albeit controversial, accomplishments for gender equality was her vocal support for a woman's right to an abortion.

Even before she became a Justice of the Supreme Court, Ginsburg made it clear that she was a staunch supporter of gender equality. While she expressed mixed feelings about the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* case concerning abortion laws in Texas because of the division it caused, Justice Ginsburg made clear in her Senate confirmation hearing for her Supreme Court appointment that she would uphold an individual's constitutional right to privacy, and would fight for women's equality. She told the Senate

that she believed the right to an abortion to be “central to a woman’s life, to her wellbeing and dignity,” and that the government’s control over the right to an abortion demonstrates how women are treated as if they are less than a “fully adult human responsible for her own choices.” Ginsburg carried this sentiment through her entire tenure on the Supreme Court, reiterating her stance on gender equality several times as a justice.

Beyond her stance on *Roe v. Wade*, Justice Ginsburg used her position on the Supreme Court to argue for further constitutional protections for women. A notable example of this is in the opinion she wrote for the 1996 *United States v. Virginia* case. In this case, the Virginia Military Institute violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th amendment by denying women admission and then by proposing the creation of a separate institution for women. Ginsburg found this reminiscent of the segregation that had taken place across the United States decades earlier and fought for women to be allowed into the Virginia Military Institute.

Justice Ginsburg again indicated her stance on gender equality in the 2007 *Ledbetter v. Goodyear* case, where she dissented against the Supreme Court’s decision. *Ledbetter*, who had been receiving lower pay than her male coworkers, was told by the court that the statute of limitations under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act began to run at the beginning of each individual pay period, even if a woman being paid less did not realize the discrepancy until after. Ginsburg dissented from the court’s opinion claiming that many women do not know they are being paid less than male coworkers, so expecting them to act at the time of each pay period was impossible. Her opinion went on to inspire the *Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act* put into effect under Barack Obama in 2008.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is an American hero of justice and equality. Her long and impactful legacy will continue to inspire millions of Americans for years to come. Her landmark decisions while serving on the Supreme Court empowered the women who will continue to champion for gender equality today.