

The Notorious RBG and Her Legacy

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, born into an immigrant Jewish family in 1933, was a widely known US Supreme Court Justice who passed away just a few weeks ago. She was an important figure for the progressive side of the Democrat spectrum, especially known for her revolutionary work in the fields of civil, women's and LGBTQ+ rights. Despite the political dispute surrounding her mortem, RBG has left behind a legacy that would outgrow anyone who might be filling in her spot.

Justice Ginsburg was the 2nd ever justice to ever sit on the bench of the United States Supreme Court, following Justice Sandra O'Connor. She was appointed justice in 1993 by then President Bill Clinton, who had proclaimed: "Ruth Bader Ginsburg cannot be called a liberal or a conservative; she had proved herself too thoughtful for such labels." President Clinton's remarks about the late Justice were derived from the fact that up until her days at the bench, she earned her reputation as a centrist, voting with conservatives many times. However, during her time on the bench, she moved noticeably to the left which made her serve as a counterbalance to the court itself. Although only her time as a Supreme Court Justice is mostly known among the US population, her steps getting up there are worth noting as well.^[1]

Growing up in an unequal America where sexism was mainstream and institutionalized to the fullest, Ginsburg was confronted with the inequities of the system at a very young age. She entered Harvard Law School, being one of the 9 women who were admitted in a class of 500, where the dean openly asked her how she could justify taking the place of a man at his school. Later graduating at the top of her class from Columbia, she was still rejected by every law firm in New York City mostly for being Jewish, woman and mother.^[2] Deciding to deal with these challenges head on, Ginsburg turned to activism. Her approach favored incrementalism and she acted very cautious in her pursuit. For example, she argued a case where a man was denied benefits after his wife had died in childbirth, which helped prove to an all-male Supreme Court that gender-discrimination harmed men too. In this manner, she was able to win their empathy for future cases.^[3] She argued a total of six cases in the Supreme Court as an attorney and won five, setting the base for many "common sense" arguments that we have today in regards to gender-based discrimination.^[4]

Some of the most notable RBG Supreme Court rulings include the 1996 *United States v. Virginia* case, for which she wrote the majority opinion for women to be accepted into the

Virginia Military Academy alongside men, which revolutionized the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution by adding equality on the basis of gender to the already existing basis of race. Despite this case, most of Ginsburg's notable Supreme Court opinions were influential dissents on different cases to advocate against discrimination and for equality on issues such as racial discrimination in voting procedures (*Shelby County v. Holder*), workplace gender discrimination (*Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company*), and reproductive health (*Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*). On the other hand, her most recent rulings where she sided with the majority were landmark cases for American progressiveness, the *Obergefell v. Hodges* to legalize same-sex marriage in all 50 states and *King v. Burrell* which upheld a vital component of Obamacare.^[5]

Although RBG had made some questionable decisions in the past on some cases which would contradict her left-appealing reputation, such as voting against re-hearing the discrimination case of a sailor who claimed to be discharged from the US Navy for being gay,^[6] she has always been an advocate for a just and equal world and she has worked to uphold that reputation. She devoted herself to elevate the status of women in the United States as well as acknowledge and legalize the rights of many more minorities.^[7] Her determined and effective career proved that one can be progressive and incrementalistic at the same time; for which she argued may be the only way to achieve everlasting change.^[8]

[1] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49488374>

[2] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49488374>

[3] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49488374>

[4] <https://www.brusselstimes.com/opinion/133885/the-indelible-yet-besieged-legacy-of-ruth-bader-ginsburg/>

[5] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/justice-ruth-bader-ginsburgs-most-notable-opinions-and-dissents-11600549902>

[6] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49488374>

[7] <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/19/opinion/ruth-bader-ginsburg-legacy.html>

[8] <https://www.brusselstimes.com/opinion/133885/the-indelible-yet-besieged-legacy-of-ruth-bader-ginsburg/>