

The Incredible Career of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

By: [Lori R. Klipeck](#)



Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

ACHIEVEMENTS

1959: Graduated #1 in her class from Columbia Law School

1959-1961: Served as a Law Clerk to the Honorable Edmund L. Palmieri, Judge of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York

1963-1972: Worked as a Professor of Law at Rutgers University School of Law

1972-1980: Worked as a Professor of Law at Columbia Law School

1980: Appointed a Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit

1993: Confirmed for the U.S. Supreme Court as the second female justice

March brings a renewed sense of energy as we shift gears to the anticipation of spring and, as I write this article, I am energized to bring to light the celebration of Women's History Month. In celebrating Women's History Month, I want to focus on incredible women in history who have made it possible for women to have basic equal rights and those who will forge ahead to continue to ensure equality.

This year, the theme for Women's History Month continues to be "Valiant Women of the Vote: Refusing to Be Silenced." The theme recognizes women obtaining the right to vote through the passage of the 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution in 1920. It is hard to imagine that a little over 100 years ago women did not have this right. However, the enactment of the 19th Amendment led the way for additional equal rights and the opportunity for women to be educated and successful in all occupations and professions.

This year's theme must include a highlight of the incredible career of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg as she personified all that Women's History Month embodies. Justice Ginsburg graduated #1 in her class from Columbia Law School in 1959, a time when female law students were in the minority, all the while raising a young family. Even so, Justice Ginsburg had difficulty finding employment after law school. In fact, Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter would not hire her as a law clerk.^[1] She eventually landed a clerkship position in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.^[2]

After her clerkship, Justice Ginsburg worked for the Columbia Law School Project on International Procedure before joining the faculty at Rutgers Law School.^[3] While at Rutgers, Justice Ginsburg learned that her salary was significantly lower than her male counterparts, and when she asked the Rutgers' Dean about a man with similar experience, she was told that he "has a wife and two children to support. You have a husband who has a good-paying job with a New York law firm."^[4] Knowing Justice Ginsburg as we now do, it should come as no surprise that she, along with other women at Rutgers, filed a lawsuit seeking equal pay. The lawsuit eventually settled in 1969. During a lecture series at Berkeley Law School in December 2019, Justice Ginsburg told the audience that the "lowest increase that any woman got was \$6,000, which in those days was a lot more than it is today."^[5]

Justice Ginsburg was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals in 1980 and then to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1993, where she served as a justice until her death in 2020. Throughout Justice Ginsburg's career, she was an advocate for women's rights, gender equality, and civil rights, even as she overcame her own challenges. One of the most notable opinions that Justice Ginsburg wrote was striking down the male-only admissions policy at the Virginia Military Institute as violating the 14th Amendment in *United States v. Virginia*, 518 US 515 (1996).

Due to women like Justice Ginsburg, I was fortunate enough to be able to follow my dream to become an attorney and now a partner at Brouse McDowell, a firm at the forefront of women's equality.^[6]

While we continue to move ahead in a changing society, we should remember Justice Ginsburg's quote that, "... generally in our society, real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time." I hope that each of you take some time this month to reflect on all the incredible women in our lives and think about the trailblazers who have gone before us and fought for the rights that we are so fortunate to have in 2021.

^[1] https://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/family_ties1

^[2] *Id.*

^[3] *Id.*

^[4] See Berkeley Talks transcript: Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg on overcoming the odds, available at <https://news.berkeley.edu/2019/12/14/berkeley-talks-transcript-ruth-bader-ginsburg/>

^[5] *Id.*

^[6] Brouse ranks No. 1 for the highest percentage of local female partners with firms of more than 15 female partners in Northeast Ohio, according to *Crain's Cleveland Business* 2020 List of Largest Law Firms. Brouse further exceeds the national average of female partners and is ranked No. 1 in Ohio and No. 8 nationally for the highest representation of female equity partners among law firms with between 51-100 attorneys, according to *Law360's* Glass Ceiling 2020 Report.

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