

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg dies at 87

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.21.20

Word Count **1,117**

Level **1040L**



Image 1. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the East conference room at the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., on August 30, 2013. Ginsburg died on September 18, 2020, after serving 27 years on the nation's highest court. Photo: Nikki Kahn/The Washington Post via Getty Images

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a women's rights champion who became the court's second female justice, died on September 18 in Washington, D.C. The court said that Ginsburg died of complications from pancreatic cancer. She was 87 years old.

Ginsburg died just six weeks before Election Day. There is likely to be a heated battle over whether President Donald Trump should nominate, and the Republican-led Senate should confirm, her replacement now. Many will argue that the seat should remain vacant until the outcome of the presidential election is known.

Chief Justice John Roberts expressed his grief over Ginsburg's passing, saying that the Supreme Court had lost a cherished coworker. "Our nation has lost a jurist of historic stature," Roberts said. "We have confidence that future generations will remember Ruth Bader Ginsburg as we knew her. A tireless champion of justice."

Ginsburg spent her final years as the unquestioned leader of the court's liberal wing, who were pushing for social change. Young women especially seemed to embrace Ginsberg, affectionately calling her "the Notorious RBG." The nickname was inspired by her defense of the rights of women and minorities.

Ginsburg had suffered from multiple health issues in her later years. They included five bouts with cancer beginning in 1999. She also endured falls that resulted in broken ribs and the insertion of a stent to clear a blocked artery.

A Liberal Voice Among Conservatives

She resisted calls by liberals to retire during Barack Obama's presidency in 2014. At this time Democrats held the Senate and a replacement with similar forward-thinking views could have been confirmed. Instead, Trump will almost certainly try to push Ginsburg's replacement through the Republican-controlled Senate. This will move the conservative court even more to the right. Conservatives prefer the way things are traditionally done and will select a justice with conservative views.



Her appointment by President Bill Clinton in 1993 was the first by a Democrat in 26 years. Ginsburg initially found a comfortable ideological home somewhere left of center on a conservative court. Her liberal voice grew stronger the longer she served and she strongly favored the rights of women and the working class.

Ginsburg was an opera lover and an intellectual who watched arguments behind oversized glasses for many years. Though she ditched them for more fashionable frames in her later years. She was known for digging deep into case records and for being a stickler for the rules.

"Ruth Bader Ginsburg does not need a seat on the Supreme Court to earn her place in the American history books," Clinton said at the time of her appointment. "She has already done that."

She argued six key cases before the court in the 1970s when she was an architect of the women's rights movement. She won five. One of her most significant cases was the 1996 ruling that ordered the Virginia Military Institute to accept women or give up its state funding. Ginsburg also took an interest in capital punishment, voting repeatedly to limit its use.

The Author Of Powerful Dissents

She was often at odds with the court's more conservative members. Although she was close friends with the uncompromising and conservative associate justice Antonin Scalia, a man who was her ideological opposite. Ginsburg once explained that she took Scalia's sometimes biting dissenting opinions as a challenge to be met. "How am I going to answer this in a way that's a real putdown?" she said.

Ginsburg authored powerful dissents of her own in cases involving abortion, voting rights and pay discrimination against women. A dissent is an opinion written by a justice who disagrees with the majority opinion. She said some were aimed at swaying the opinions of her fellow judges. Others

were "an appeal to the intelligence of another day" in the hopes that they would provide counsel to future courts.

In 2013 she wrote about the court's decision to cut out a key part of the Voting Rights Act. It was a national law that had ensured the voting rights of people of color. She said it was "like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet."

In 1999, Ginsburg had surgery for colon cancer. She had surgery again in 2009 after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and in December 2018 for cancerous growths on her left lung. Following the last surgery, she missed court sessions for the first time in more than 25 years on the bench.

Ginsburg also was treated with radiation for a tumor on her pancreas in August 2019. She maintained an active work schedule even during her cancer treatment. When she revealed the return of her cancer in July 2020, Ginsburg said she remained "fully able" to continue as a Supreme Court justice.



A Law School Trailblazer

Joan Ruth Bader was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1933. She was the second daughter in a low-income, working-class family where her mother taught her the value of independence and a good education. Her older sister, who gave her the lifelong nickname "Kiki," died at age 6, so Ginsburg grew up in Brooklyn's Flatbush neighborhood as an only child. Her dream, she has said, was to be an opera singer.

Ginsburg graduated at the top of her Columbia University law school class in 1959 but no law firm would hire her. She said she had been discriminated against for being Jewish, female and a mother.

She married Martin Ginsburg in 1954, the year she graduated from Cornell University. She attended Harvard University's law school but transferred to Columbia when her husband took a law job there. At Harvard, there were only eight other women in her class of more than 500, and the law school's head chided them for taking the places of men. Martin Ginsburg died in 2010. Ruth Bader Ginsburg is survived by two children, Jane and James, and several grandchildren.

Ginsburg once said that she had not entered the law as an equal-rights champion. "I thought I could do a lawyer's job better than any other," she wrote. "I have no talent in the arts, but I do write fairly well and analyze problems clearly."

Quiz

- 1 Which two of the following sentences from the article include CENTRAL ideas of the article?
1. *"Our nation has lost a jurist of historic stature," Roberts said.*
 2. *She resisted calls by liberals to retire during Barack Obama's presidency in 2014.*
 3. *Her liberal voice grew stronger the longer she served and she strongly favored the rights of women and the working class.*
 4. *When she revealed the return of her cancer in July 2020, Ginsburg said she remained "fully able" to continue as a Supreme Court justice.*
- (A) 1 and 2
- (B) 1 and 3
- (C) 2 and 4
- (D) 3 and 4
- 2 Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) Ruth Bader Ginsburg's dream when she was a child in Brooklyn, New York, was to become a famous opera star.
- (B) Ruth Bader Ginsburg compared cutting a part of the Voting Rights Act with a person throwing away an umbrella in a storm.
- (C) Ruth Bader Ginsburg transferred from Harvard University's law school to Columbia University's law school.
- (D) Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death likely will cause an intense battle about who should appoint her replacement.
- 3 How did Justice Antonin Scalia affect Ruth Bader Ginsburg?
- (A) He encouraged Ginsburg to become a part of the Supreme Court after her nomination in 1993.
- (B) He helped Ginsburg to establish her position as a left-of-center justice on a conservative court.
- (C) He motivated Ginsburg to strive to more effectively respond to his dissenting opinions.
- (D) He swayed Ginsburg's opinion on many important cases brought before the Supreme Court.
- 4 According to the article, WHY did President Bill Clinton think that Ruth Bader Ginsburg already had an important legacy prior to joining the Supreme Court?
- (A) She argued six key cases before the Supreme Court involving women's rights in the 1970s, winning five.
- (B) She graduated at the top of her Columbia University law school class in 1959.
- (C) She successfully ordered the Virginia Military Institute to begin accepting women.
- (D) She had been embraced as an icon by many young women across the United States.

Answer Key

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