

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

NOTORIOUS RBG: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RUTH BADER GINSBURG

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Selected PR Images

The New-York Historical Society honors the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg (RBG)—the trailblazing Supreme Court justice and cultural icon—with a special exhibition. Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg is based on the popular Tumblr and bestselling book of the same name. A traveling exhibition organized by the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, the show takes an expansive and engaging look at the justice’s life and work, highlighting her ceaseless efforts to protect civil rights and foster equal opportunity for all Americans. Notorious RBG features archival photographs and documents, historical artifacts, contemporary art, media stations, and gallery interactives spanning RBG’s varied roles.

Official portrait of United States Supreme Court Justice Ruth Joan Bader Ginsburg. Courtesy Steve Petteway, Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.

At the age of 80, Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was reborn as the “Notorious RBG.” She earned the admiring, tongue-in-cheek nickname after a series of fiery, record-breaking dissents she gave from the Supreme Court bench in 2013 on voting rights, affirmative action, and workplace discrimination. Behind the nickname was a woman with a lifelong commitment to equality, justice, and the ideals of American law.



Notorious RBG book cover illustration by Adam Johnson. Courtesy of HarperCollins. Photographs: Crown © by Hurst Photo/Shutterstock; Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.



RBG became an icon to millions of people around the globe. All this is—to use the court’s language—without precedent, especially in a society that tends to dismiss the contributions of women as they age. Bestselling books about RBG for all age groups—including the 2015 book Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg that inspired the exhibition—could fill a bookshelf.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, by Everett Raymond Kinstler, 1996. Oil on canvas. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Everett Raymond Kinstler. © 1996 Everett Raymond Kinstler.



RBG wasn’t President Bill Clinton’s first choice for the Supreme Court in 1993—he came close to offering the position to several men. But RBG had the backing of key women in the administration and a tireless lobbying campaign by her husband in her favor. Above all, she dazzled the president in their first meeting. “She got the actual human impact of these decisions,” Clinton later recalled.

Ruth Bader as a child, 1935. Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.



The future Justice Ginsburg was born Joan Ruth Bader on March 15, 1933. Nicknamed “Kiki,” she grew up in Flatbush, a working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Her parents, Celia and Nathan Bader, rented a small first-floor apartment in a gray stucco row house. Many of her neighbors were immigrants or first- and second-generation Americans whose families had come from Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe in search of a better life.

The Alpha Epsilon Phi sorority at Cornell University in 1953, featuring Ruth Bader, class of 1954, pictured third from right standing in front of the porch. Published in *The Cornellian*, 1953. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.



"I got the idea that being a lawyer was a pretty good thing because in addition to practicing a profession, you could do something good for your society." RBG began at Cornell University on a full scholarship in the fall of 1950. There, she began to view lawyers as vanguards against injustice.

Ruth as a bride, June 1954. Courtesy of Justice Ginsburg's Personal Collection.



Ruth Bader married Martin "Marty" D. Ginsburg (1932–2010) in 1954. Their marriage defied gender expectations of the period and embodied her belief that "men, women, and families are better when both partners share their lives and goals on equal footing." For nearly 60 years, RBG and her husband worked as equals raising a family and practicing law. Marty was a passionate supporter of his life partner's legal career and shared in child-rearing and household responsibilities long before men were expected to do so.

RBG and Marty with their daughter, Jane, 1958. Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.



In 1957, Marty was diagnosed with testicular cancer. The doctor prescribed radical surgery and radiation for six weeks. The prognosis was grim. RBG poured her heart into making sure he remained on track with his studies, staying up all night to type his papers and class notes. When Marty fell asleep around 2 am, RBG would begin her own work. Her hours with their daughter Jane before bed helped leaven the library time.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg teaching at Columbia Law School, 1972. Courtesy of Columbia Law School.

In 1972, RBG become Columbia Law School's first tenured female professor, which she juggled with her responsibilities at the Women's Rights Project. Almost immediately, the women at Columbia began contacting RBG for help. Did RBG know that Columbia employees didn't have pregnancy coverage and that women got lower pension benefits and lower pay? Now that she did, RBG helped file a class-action lawsuit.



Ruth Bader Ginsburg, detail from 1972 *Harvard Law School Yearbook*. © Harvard Law School Yearbook Association, Courtesy of Harvard Law School Library, Historical and Special Collections.

RBG strongly preferred the prefix "Ms." to "Mrs." However, there is no information about how she felt when this 1972 Harvard Law School yearbook misidentified her as "Mr. Ginsburg."



RUTH BADER GINSBURG
Lecturer on Law

Mr. Ginsburg, Professor of Law at Rutgers Law School (Newark), currently visits one day each week to teach a course and assist students engaged in projects relating to sex-based discrimination and the law.

Born: 1933, New York, New York.
B.A. Cornell University 1954; Harvard Law School 1956-58 LL.B.
Columbia 1959.

RBG and Marty taking a break from work, 1972. Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.

With the same fondly amused grin he usually wore, Marty (1932–2010) would portray himself as the lucky guy who came along for the ride of a lifetime, who moved to Washington when his wife got a "good job." In fact, Marty was a superstar in his own right, whose tax law chops earned him clients like Ross Perot, the adulation of his peers, and millions of dollars. But he was proudest of the accomplishments of his wife, saying, "I think that the most important thing I have done is enable Ruth to do what she has done."



RBG as a federal appeals court judge, 1980. Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.



President Jimmy Carter nominated Ruth Bader Ginsburg to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit on April 14, 1980. RBG saw the role of an appeals court judge as fundamentally different than her old job at the ACLU; she was to follow precedent, not try to change it. As a judge, she looked for consensus.

Justice Antonin Scalia and RBG riding an elephant, 1994. Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.



Some liberals found the Scalia-Ginsburg friendship hard to grapple with. Even their clerks were mystified by the relationship. But clerks work at the court for only a year. Justices work there for life. Whatever their disagreements, they stuck together. The two shared a love of opera, and RBG liked people who could make her laugh.

Courtroom sketch of Justice Ginsburg's dissent in *Shelby County v. Holder*, June 25, 2013. Sketch by Art Lien.



In Shelby County v. Holder, the Supreme Court voted 5–4 to strike down a portion of the Voting Rights Act. In his majority opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts said the provision was no longer needed. “Any racial discrimination in voting is too much, but our country has changed in the last 50 years,” he declared. In her dissent, which inspired the nickname Notorious RBG, RBG compared getting rid of the provision to “throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you’re not getting wet.”

Ari Richter, *RBG Tattoo II*, 2018. Pigmented human skin on glass. Courtesy of the artist.

RBG's life and work have inspired unending creativity, including literally thousands of examples of fan-created RBG memorabilia. You can find RBG's likeness on T-shirts, nail decals, and even as tattoos.



Roxana Alfer Geffen, *Dissent Collar #9*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

Moved by her anger over the 2016 presidential election, Roxana Alger Geffen created a series of imaginative jabots in honor of RBG. Geffen was inspired by RBG's choice to wear her famous dissent collar the day after the election.



RBG image projected onto New York State Civil Supreme Court building in Manhattan, September 19, 2020. Courtesy Reuters/Andrew Kelly/Alamy Photo.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wasn't just a titan whose life and career revealed many of the legal and historical developments of the 20th century. She also was a New Yorker. Her hometown viscerally felt her loss upon her death in September 2020.



50th Street subway stop altered in tribute to RBG, 2020. Courtesy Adrian Wilson and Matt Duncan.

The 50th Street ACE subway station sign in Manhattan was famously altered with a tribute sticker by Adrian Wilson and Matt Duncan on the day RBG passed.



RBG memorial outside Columbia University, 2020. Courtesy of Cristian Petru Panaite

Memorials sprung up spontaneously and organically across the city.



Fearless Girl with jabot, 2020
Courtesy Jennifer M. Mason / Shutterstock.com

The memory of the justice's life and work fueled activism during the ensuing presidential election season across the city and beyond.

