

RBG played the long game on making real change for women ... and men

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Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had a history of playing the long game. Her work in the 1970s, as an advocate for the ACLU, was about making change gradually so it would be long-lasting. She did so effectively with the cases she argued before the Supreme Court. She often chose silence over angry responses, strategy over impulse. During this time in history, this may be an underappreciated talent.

RBG faced obstacle after obstacle on her path to becoming a lawyer. She was one of nine women in a class of 500 at Harvard Law. She was a mother at the time and her husband battled cancer while they were both students. Finishing first in her class at Columbia, she could not obtain employment. She said she had three strikes against her—she was a mother, a woman, and was Jewish. She wanted to change the world. She wanted to make a difference. So, she kept fighting for the things she cared about.

RBG became a law professor and a renowned scholar. She co-founded the ACLU Women's Rights Project and focused her efforts on correcting sex-based differentials found within the law.

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RBG would bristle when people would say she was working on women's rights. She saw her work as furthering equality for all. Her plan was to convince the Court, and legislators, that statutes with sex-based differentials disadvantaged women and men. A case very close to her heart was *Weinberger v. Wiesenfeld* where she represented Stephen Wiesenfeld, a widower whose wife passed away during childbirth. Stephen wanted to stay home with their son but because he was a widowed father, and not a widowed mother, he was excluded from receiving Social Security benefits. She was successful in convincing the court this was an unconstitutional violation based on gender discrimination.

RBG was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit by President Jimmy Carter in 1980. When President Bill Clinton asked Justice Antonin Scalia who he should appoint for the open Supreme Court seat, Justice Scalia told him Ruth Bader Ginsburg. They had been colleagues and he thought a lot of her—though they were far apart on an ideological spectrum. President Clinton did indeed appoint RBG and her nomination sailed through, even with support from conservative Senator Orrin Hatch. RBG was only the second female to serve on the Supreme Court. RBG and Justice Scalia became close friends. She respected Justice Scalia and enjoyed his company, remarking on his ability to make her laugh. RBG said Justice Scalia made her better. She was known for her powerful dissents as a Justice, hopeful that someday they might become the majority opinion of the Court. RBG was a prolific writer, often working very late into the night. She believed in tight, concise writing without legalese so the public could understand the minutiae behind the law. RBG was cognizant of her responsibility to explain her decisions and thoughts on the law. Her generosity of spirit, her ability to form working relationships with those of opposing views, and her work ethic should be a lesson for all. During her confirmation hearing before the United States Senate in 1993, she explained her strategy to educate men, those in power to create change, that though they thought they were sparing women from a messy world, they were really limiting their opportunities and aspirations when they passed statutes treating women as less than a fully adult human. She reiterated her opinion that "change in our society is incremental" and "[r]eal change, enduring change, happens one step at a time." RBG's voice is one that, through a calculated strategy, moved the United States toward notions of equality. It is a voice that will endure.

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