

The Women's White Collar Defense Association mourns the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a lifelong champion for gender equality and the second woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. We all owe Justice Ginsburg an immense debt, not only for her tireless work to dismantle legal stereotypes that reinforced unfounded distinctions between men and women, but also more broadly to her pathbreaking career, in which she personally overcame innumerable obstacles to her professional advancement and relentlessly pursued justice for all.

An organization like WWCDA, composed of thousands of women lawyers and other women professionals around the world, would have been hard to imagine when Justice Ginsburg began her own legal career. One of only nine women admitted to Harvard Law School in 1956, she and the other female students were challenged by Dean Erwin Griswold why they were occupying seats that, in his view, should otherwise be filled by men. Undeterred, Justice Ginsburg ultimately graduated at the top of her class at Columbia Law School (after transferring to follow her husband to New York). Despite her achievements, not a single New York law firm would hire her. Although she was recommended for a U.S. Supreme Court clerkship with Justice Felix Frankfurter, he refused to hire her because she was a woman. She eventually clerked for District Judge Edmund Palmieri only after her professor threatened not to send the judge another law clerk unless he hired his star student.

When Justice Ginsburg began teaching at Rutgers Law School, she was told that she was paid less than her male colleagues because she had a husband who earned a good income. All of this discrimination, then entirely commonplace in the profession, motivated Justice Ginsburg to devote her legal career to dismantling societal impediments to women in the workplace. That Justice Ginsburg became the first female tenured professor at Columbia Law School, and the second woman to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, and ultimately the U.S. Supreme Court, is a testament to Justice Ginsburg's extraordinary work ethic and unwavering perseverance to "fight for the things [she] care[s] about." A titan among jurists, Justice Ginsburg's brilliant decisions and powerful dissents paved the way for all of us.

It is because of Justice Ginsburg's groundbreaking work and jurisprudence that many of us could attend law school, serve as law clerks, and obtain positions of power in both the private and public sector. And also why so many of us have been able to achieve professional success while having fulfilling partnerships and raising families. As Justice Ginsburg once remarked: "We are at last beginning to relegate to the history books the idea of the token woman." In short, we owe her everything.

As we grieve her death, WWCDA commits to honor Justice Ginsburg's legacy and fulfill our organization's core mission to promote equality and inclusion within the legal profession and beyond.