



February 2019 Her Story ENewsletter Judges

The recent movies *RBG* and *On the Basis of Sex* demonstrate some of the hurdles U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had to overcome. In this month's ENewsletter, we profile two other legal pioneers: Florence Allen and Constance Baker Motley.

A woman of many firsts, **Florence Allen** did her undergraduate work (Phi Beta Kappa) at Case Western University. Since the law school at Case Western did not admit women, she began her law education at the University of Chicago in 1909, the only woman in a class of 100 students. Having to pay for her education, she moved to New York City, worked with immigrants and as a lecturer before enrolling at the New York University Law School. Although second in her class when she graduated in 1913, she did not receive any job offers from the New York legal firms (the same situation faced decades later by RBG) so she moved back to Cleveland, Ohio.



Florence Allen

Allen was admitted to the bar in Ohio in 1914 and began the practice of law. In 1919, she was appointed assistant prosecutor for Cuyahoga County. After the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution enfranchising women was ratified in 1920, her friends urged her to run for a judgeship. Although the primaries had already been held, she submitted a petition and was elected judge on the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas - the first woman elected to a judicial office in the country. In 1922, she became the first woman elected to the highest court in any state, when she won the election to the Supreme Court of Ohio. In 1934, she became the first woman appointed and confirmed to a federal appeals court judgeship when she began service on the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals (President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her).



Constance Baker Motley

Like Florence Allen, **Constance Baker Motley** was also a woman of many firsts. Although she decided at age 15 that she wanted to be a lawyer, finances were an issue. After receiving an offer to have her college paid for her, she enrolled at Fisk University and then transferred to New York University from which she graduated. In 1946, when she graduated from Columbia Law School, she was only the second African-American woman to have achieved that milestone.

Motley worked at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund with the famed Thurgood Marshall. She was the first African-American woman to argue cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and she won nine out of 10 of those cases between 1961 and 1963. The first woman to be elected to the New York State Senate (in 1964), she became the first woman to serve as Manhattan Borough President in 1965. In 1966, President Johnson appointed her to the U.S. District Court, the first African-American woman to hold a federal judgeship.

Florence Allen, Constance Baker Motley and Ruth Bader Ginsburg are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

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