

GHandout #1

Source: An excerpted Interview with Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court and Gloria Steinem (the full interview is available [here](#)), New York Times, November 14th, 2015.

PG (Philip Gaines, Reporter): Rap names aside, your careers unfolded side by side at the forefront of the women's movement. When did you meet?

GS (Gloria Steinem): When Ruth was at the A.C.L.U. What comes to mind are these cases in which young African-American women were being sterilized without their permission.

RBG (Ruth Bader Ginsburg): There was an irony. We couldn't get abortions. But there was this notorious obstetrician, and if it was a woman's third child, he would automatically sterilize her.

GS: The A.C.L.U. would not have taken up that case if it hadn't been for Ruth.

PG: Were you a Ms. reader?

RBG: I certainly was. From the first issue. I thought it was wonderful.

GS: And I knew from other women that Ruth was our champion and teacher.

PG: When you were young, women couldn't rent apartments or get credit cards without men. Did you buy into that?

RBG: Gloria went to Smith; I went to Cornell. It was the school for parents who wanted to make sure their girl would find a man. Four guys for every woman. If you came out without a husband, you were hopeless.

PG: Was Smith more enlightened in the early '50s?

GS: It was a women's college, but the emphasis was on marriage. Even the Smith president of the era said, "We are educating women because to have educated children, we must have educated mothers." The idea that women would do something other than produce children was not out there.

PG: Time for galling stories: Will you tell us more about that dinner of brand-new Harvard law women, when the dean invited all nine of you, from a class of 500, and asked, "How do you justify taking a spot from a qualified man?"

RBG: I was so embarrassed. The dean had each of the women escorted by a distinguished professor. Mine looked more like God than any man I ever met. He was also a chain smoker, so we were sharing an ashtray on my lap. When I stood to speak, the cigarette butts fell on the living-room floor. But I gave him the answer he expected: "My husband is a second-year law student, and it's important for a woman to understand her husband's work."

PG: Did you really think that?

RBG: Of course not!

GS: That's called "Aunt Tom-ing," I think.

RBG: The only thing that really bothered me is they had given me a generous scholarship. We had to take two years off when [my husband] Marty was in the service. And when I applied for readmission, they said, "Submit your father-in-law's financial statement."

GS: You can't make this up.

RBG: They shouldn't give scholarship funds to a person with family money, but you can be sure they never asked a guy to submit his father-in-law's statement.

GS: Or his mother-in-law's.

PG: Now, Gloria's turn: Early in your career, you're sitting in the back of a cab, between Gay Talese and Saul Bellow, and Gay says: "Every year a pretty girl comes to New York and pretends to be a writer. This year, it's Gloria." Any desire to push him out the door?

GS: I had just interviewed Saul Bellow in Chicago, but it wasn't published yet. My first response was, "Oh, he's going to be regretful that he gave an interview to someone who's not really a writer." It wasn't until we were out of the taxi that I got angry. And it wasn't until years later that I got really angry.

PG: But your first thought was to doubt yourself.

GS: And in a weird way, to be fair to Gay Talese, he thought it was a compliment. He didn't see that I wanted to be a serious writer.