

WOMEN'S HISTORY SPOTLIGHT

A Civics In Real Life Series

FEMALE FIRSTS

KETANJI BROWN JACKSON



For 178 years, the United States Supreme Court was composed of white male justices. This first changed in 1967 when President Lyndon B. Johnson nominated [Thurgood Marshall](#) to the Court. Upon confirmation, Justice Marshall became the first African-American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. Fourteen years later, in 1981 [Sandra Day O'Connor](#) was nominated and sworn in as the first female U.S. Supreme Court justice. June 30, 2022 marked another round of U.S. Supreme Court firsts. On this day, Ketanji Brown Jackson was [sworn in as associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court](#), breaking another glass ceiling as the first Black woman on the nation's highest court. Joining female justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Amy Coney Barrett, it will also be the first time four women will serve on the Court together.

[Ketanji Brown Jackson](#) was born in Washington D.C. but grew up in Miami, Florida. Her father served as lead counsel for Miami-Dade Public Schools while her mother was principal of the New World School of the Arts. Justice Jackson attended Harvard University both for college and law school. She has two daughters and loves improvisational comedy. In fact, she once enrolled in a Harvard acting class with Matt Damon. She completed three clerkships early in her legal career. In one of those clerkships she worked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice [Stephen Breyer](#), whose retirement created an opening on the Court. Justice Jackson also spent time in private practice. From 2005 to 2007, she served as assistant federal [public defender](#) in Washington D.C. With this experience, Justice Jackson becomes the first member with public defender experience. In 2009, President Obama nominated her as vice chair of the [U.S. Sentencing Commission](#). During her time in this role, from 2010 to 2014, she worked to reform sentencing guidelines for drug-related offenses. Justice Jackson's career transitioned to the bench in 2012 when President Obama nominated her to serve as judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. Justice Jackson was introduced at her first confirmation hearing by former U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan, a relative of Jackson by marriage, who said *"Our politics may differ, but my praise for Ketanji's intellect, for her character, for her integrity, it is unequivocal."* During her eight years on the D.C. District Court she was often faced with challenging cases in which she had to rule on the constitutionality of many [executive](#) actions. She wrote over six hundred [opinions](#) and was [reversed](#) by the U.S. Supreme Court less than a dozen times. In April 2021, President Biden nominated Justice Jackson to serve as circuit judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. After eight months in this role, President Biden [announced](#) that Jackson was his nominee for Stephen Breyer's upcoming vacancy. This was not the first time she was considered, as she was one of five individuals vetted and interviewed for the Supreme Court vacancy in 2016 when Associate Justice Antonin Scalia passed away. On April 7, 2022, Justice Jackson was confirmed by the Senate in a 53-47 [vote](#). At just 51 years old, this "female first" has a long career on the Supreme Court ahead of her. She hopes to *"inspire all young people to believe that they can one day serve their country at the highest level."*

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First woman to serve on your state Supreme Court:	
Number of women of color that serve or have served on your state Supreme Court:	

