

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the yardstick for Wikipedia entries

 devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20100329-01

March 29, 2010



Raymond Chen

I use [Ruth Bader Ginsburg's Wikipedia entry](#) as a yardstick for other Wikipedia entries. At the time I'm writing this blog entry, her Wikipedia article is 1600 words long. So 1600 words is how many words Wikipedia assigns to the 20th most powerful woman (and the most powerful female lawyer) in the world. By comparison, Wikipedia has collectively decided that the [2007 Philadelphia Eagles season](#) merits 5500 words. The exploits of a lackluster last-place American football team therefore clocks in at 3.4 Ginsburgs. In a sense, Wikipedia says that a last-place football team's exploits is over three times more significant than the most powerful woman lawyer in the world. The fictional character [John Locke from the television program *Lost*](#) comes in at 4900 words, or just above 3 Ginsburgs. Apparently Wikipedia thinks that it's notable that Locke [likes Gold Toe socks](#). [The plot summary for the movie *Little Man*](#) is approximately 1.5 Ginsburgs. That's just the plot summary, not the entire entry. We know more about the plot to a mediocre film than we know about a Supreme Court Justice. It's not just [popular culture](#) that has taken the lead on Wikipedia. It's specifically *post-2000* popular culture. The television program *The Brady Bunch*, which has been influencing United States popular culture for decades, merits a simple [list of episodes](#), whereas the short-lived and totally forgotten show *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* spends 1300 words just on the subject of [references from the show to other Sorkin shows](#). Even the Internet video [The Bus Uncle](#) weighs in at 1.8 Ginsburgs. Slate's Timothy Noah, who is certainly more notable than I am, also [takes issue with Wikipedia's notability guidelines](#) after being [evicted from Wikipedia](#) and subsequently [reinstated](#). Reuters noted that [the Wikipedia page is the new status symbol](#).

For some reason I have a Wikipedia entry, despite not being “the subject of multiple, non-trivial published works from sources that are reliable and independent of the subject and of each other.” As far as I'm aware, nobody has written even one book about me, much less multiple.

[Raymond Chen](#)

Follow



