

2000

# Introduction of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

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## Recommended Citation

Strossen, Nadine, "Introduction of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg" (2000). *Articles & Chapters*. 1167.  
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NEW YORK LAW SCHOOL LAW REVIEW DINNER

FEBRUARY 12, 1999

INTRODUCTION OF JUSTICE RUTH BADER GINSBURG

NADINE STROSSEN

I am so honored to introduce someone who has been a heroine and inspiration to me for as long as I can remember. She is also someone who will be a heroine and inspiration for all future generations, all over the world.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg will go down in history, of course, for her historic contributions to women's rights—and, more broadly, human rights—both as a pioneering advocate, and as a respected judge.

As an advocate, she persuaded the Supreme Court that the Constitution's equal protection guarantee applies to gender stereotypes and discrimination. This may seem obvious to current law students, but when I was a student, the Court had not yet taken even this first, crucial, step toward gender justice. The Court finally was pointed in the right direction by Ruth Bader Ginsburg — and, I am proud to say, the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union, under her leadership.

And, now that she is on the high Court herself, Justice Ginsburg is playing an even greater leadership role. Consider her eloquent opinion for the Court in *U.S. v. Virginia*,<sup>1</sup> striking down the Virginia Military Institute's exclusion of women. It will surely go down in history as one of the landmarks in the long, ongoing struggle for liberty and justice for all, including women.

But I do not need to tell you about Justice Ginsburg's extraordinary contributions to justice and society, which have earned her worldwide fame and acclaim. As party favors, we have given you copies of one excellent account of Justice Ginsburg's pathbreaking jurisprudence, which should be of particular interest to this audience, because it was written by someone who was then a New York Law School student and published in our *Law Review's* sister publication, the *New York Law*

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1. 518 U.S. 515 (1996).

*School Journal of Human Rights*: an article entitled, *The House That Ruth Built*, by Carol Pressman.<sup>2</sup>

Carol was one of my Research Assistants, so I know what happened after she sent a routine courtesy copy of her article to Justice Ginsburg. Carol got a very UNroutine thank-you letter from the Justice, expressing appreciation for the piece, and even asking for a couple reprints to share with some family members! Such a gesture would be extraordinary for most subjects or recipients of law review pieces, especially those written by students. For Ruth Bader Ginsburg, though, this was not an extraordinary act, but rather, an ordinary act on the part of an extraordinary person.

That leads to my major point: why Justice Ginsburg would be my heroine even beyond her unsurpassed contributions to law and justice. That is because she is one of the most generous, thoughtful, considerate, and gracious people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. In particular, she is constantly supportive and encouraging and helpful to women, lawyers, law students, civil libertarians, and anyone else who is fortunate enough to cross her path.

I consider it one of my great fortunes that I first crossed paths with Ruth Bader Ginsburg many years ago. I was a young ACLU volunteer lawyer in my hometown of Minneapolis, and she was a national ACLU leader, who was already making legal history. Still, she went out of her way to convey toward me both professional encouragement and personal warmth.

Since that first, inspiring contact, Justice Ginsburg has been not only my heroine, but also my role model. Of course, I have tried to emulate her in working for gender equality and other civil liberties causes. I have also tried very hard to approach her very high standards in another area that is almost as important to me as human rights — namely, clothing and fashion! With her consistent elegance and individuality in this realm, Justice Ginsburg has even upgraded the traditional Supreme Court uniform!

Most importantly, I will always try to live up to the great generosity that Justice Ginsburg has shown to countless young lawyers — such as myself, a generation ago, and Carol Pressman more recently. Justice Ginsburg is one of the most powerful people in the whole world, with enormous responsibilities that keep her working almost constantly. And yet she still always takes the time — MAKES the time — to extend a helping hand, or say an encouraging word, to innumerable individuals.

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2. 14 N.Y.L. SCH. J. HUM. RTS. 311.

Let me cite just a few examples that directly relate to New York Law School, even beyond the obvious fact that she is gracing us with her presence tonight. Justice Ginsburg regularly makes it possible for many NYLS students to attend Supreme Court arguments in important cases — an incomparable, unforgettable experience. What is more, just within the past year, she has personally met at the Court with two groups of our students: in my advanced constitutional law course and in Professor James Simon’s course on the modern Supreme Court.

For these lucky students, these experiences will always remain a highlight not just of their legal education, but indeed of their legal careers.

Justice Ginsburg began her distinguished legal career as a law professor. Now, on top of all the other exceptional contributions she is making to our society, she also continues to be a dedicated educator in the fullest possible sense: not only informing, but also inspiring; not only through her eloquent words, but also through her influential deeds; not only through public contributions to our legal system, but also through private contributions to anonymous individuals.

History may not record Justice Ginsburg’s generous efforts of the latter type, but they have left indelible marks in the hearts and minds of all of us they have touched. And we will in turn try to spread that spirit to everyone with whom we come in contact. So, this personal, private legacy will ultimately be as enduring and pervasive as Justice Ginsburg’s public, professional achievements.

As I have said, one of the reasons why I have been fortunate enough to know Justice Ginsburg is through our common ACLU commitments. When I was first elected to the ACLU’s National Board and later as one of its General Counsel, I was particularly proud that in both roles, I was following in the distinguished footsteps of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

As some of you will recall, during the 1988 Presidential campaign, George Bush attacked his rival, Michael Dukakis, for being a “card-carrying member” of the ACLU. In some quarters, at that time, ACLU membership was hardly a helpful credential for public office! Therefore, I was especially delighted when, only a few years later, the Senate resoundingly acclaimed Justice Ginsburg’s ascension to the Supreme Court, despite the fact that she had been not only an ACLU member, but also one of our leaders. Actually, I like to think that this acclaim was not *despite* Justice Ginsburg’s ACLU involvement, but rather, *because of it!*

Or maybe it was because she hails from that legendary place, which has now broken records as the home of not only one, but two current

Supreme Court Justices — namely, Brooklyn! The *Law Review's* Supervising Editor, Amy Tenney — who is also my Academic Assistant — did a great job in putting together the printed program for tonight, as well as organizing this banquet in general. I could not help noticing how Amy chose to lead off the program's biographical write-up of Justice Ginsburg. Of all of Justice Ginsburg's historic, towering accomplishments, what did Amy choose to begin her introduction? Of course, Amy singled out that supremely important distinction: the fact that our honoree is a native of Brooklyn! (Three guesses where Amy herself comes from!) By the way, I realize that, for some loyal Brooklynites, Carol Pressman's fine piece contains an unintended insult in its title, "The House That Ruth Built" — by referring to that OTHER baseball team — the NON-Brooklyn one!

Before turning the podium over to Justice Ginsburg, I would like to share with you my favorite tribute to her on the occasion of her Supreme Court appointment. It comes from Calvin Trillin in *The Nation*, and I think you will understand why I found his words particularly powerful.

She's highly thought of in the trade.  
 The taxes for her maid were paid.  
 And somehow all the White House vetters  
 Remained unmoved by those four letters  
 That spooked Dukakis through and through —  
 The dread quartet, A.C.L.U.  
 The paths in women's law she plowed.  
 Were plowed while working for this crowd.  
 Republicans don't seem annoyed  
 To hear the judge was thus employed.  
 They cheer: She made some law impartial,  
 And gets compared to Thurgood Marshall.  
 Dukakis, Bush said, had a card —  
 With that alone poor Mike was tarred.  
 If Bush's views remain unvarying,  
 He wonders: Was the judge card-carrying?<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, we are here to present an award named after one great lawyer and public servant — Charles W. Froessel — on the birthday of

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3. Calvin Trillin, On the Nomination of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, *THE NATION*, available at [www.thenation.com](http://www.thenation.com) (last visited Jan. 6, 2001) (copy on file with New York Law School Law Review).

another great lawyer and public servant, Abraham Lincoln. And I cannot think of any lawyer or public servant who more fully embodies their outstanding personal and professional qualities than tonight's awardee, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.