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'Her Fight Is Ours To Continue': Esteemed Women Leaders Honor The Life And Legacy Of Ruth Bader Ginsburg With Their Stories, Reflections And Calls To Action



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ForbesWomen

I work to amplify women's voices, leadership and action



Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES / PUBLIC DOMAIN

When I heard the sad news of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's passing, I was devastated. Like so many of us throughout the U.S., I had always looked up to the iconic and fearless RBG as a role model and an inspiration—a courageous and brilliant trailblazer who broke through barriers and used her power and influence to transform society and uplift the rights of others.

There are, of course, many critical political ramifications with RBG's passing, which has left vacant a vital Supreme Court seat that could have cataclysmic impacts for so many issues for generations to come. However, as that coverage takes over the news cycles, we owe it to Ginsburg and to ourselves to take the time to properly celebrate and acknowledge the extraordinary life, legacy and career of a true hero and a pioneer who shaped

history as a tireless defender of women's rights and so many other important issues.

So, as I am known to do—perhaps this time as part of my own way of processing and healing and for a necessary boost of energy and inspiration—I decided to go to a group of women leaders and ask them to share some story, some remembrance, some lesson—anything that was in their heart to remind us of the spirit of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. My hope is that their reflections will not only help us properly pay tribute to her incredible legacy as a fierce advocate, public servant and legislative force for gender equality and other marginalized people and causes, but also fortify us with the conviction to carry forward her important work of fighting for what is right, even in the most challenging circumstances, such as those we are living through now.

At this moment when we may all feel worn down from the turmoil we've been facing throughout this year, may Ginsburg's perseverance, dedication, courage, empathy and integrity continue to be a shining example of so many of the qualities we need to embody within ourselves and expect of our leaders as we continue her fight for equality and justice for all people. That is how we can best pay tribute to Ruth Bader Ginsburg. As she said, "Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you," and "Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time."

Here is what other female leaders had to say to honor and remember Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Featuring: Carol Moseley Braun, Hillary Clinton, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Abigail Disney, Melinda Gates, Kirsten Gillibrand, Jane Goodall, Anita Hill, Valerie Jarrett, Carol Jenkins, Kathy Najimy, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Cecile Richards, S. Mona Sinha, Gloria Steinem, Barbra Streisand, Tina Tchen

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Anita Hill

Attorney, Professor, Activist, Chair of [The Hollywood Commission](#)

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a fearless champion of equality. As a woman of color and a lawyer, I am fortunate to have benefited both personally and professionally from her work.

Whether arguing before the Supreme Court as a lawyer or admonishing her colleagues on the court as a justice, she spoke truth to power. In doing so, she brought American law closer to our lived experiences and to the equal justice promised in our Constitution. Her impact on the law was possible because of her early practice as a civil rights attorney during the burgeoning rights movements of the 1960s and '70s.

Ginsburg's contribution to ending gender discrimination was monumental. But her legacy is broader. Her entire 60-year career was grounded in an inclusive definition of equality. As an attorney, Ginsburg drew from the foundational racial equality theories of Black civil rights activist Pauli Murray. Perhaps the most enduring line from Ginsburg's first argument before the Supreme Court is a quote from white abolitionist and suffragist Sarah Grimke: "All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks." In a groundbreaking move toward gender equality, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Ginsburg's client, acknowledging for the first time

that discrimination “on the basis of sex” was a denial of equal treatment under the law.

Gloria Steinem

Writer, lecturer, political activist, feminist organizer

We each can honor Ruth Bader Ginsburg by asking ourselves, "What would Ruth do?" Using this as a guide in our own lives will keep her with us.

We can also honor what she said so recently: "My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed."

The more we learn about her words and deeds, the more she will remain a force in our lives and the world around us.

She left us a clear and precious legacy. It's up to us to keep her spirit alive.

Hillary Clinton

Former Secretary of State, Former Senator of New York, 2016 Democratic Nominee

When Ruth Bader Ginsburg came to be interviewed for the Supreme Court vacancy Bill had to fill, she was told that it would be a casual interview on a Sunday afternoon. Bill knew that she was coming, so he got out of his Sunday afternoon football-watching clothes and put on a suit and tie, and she came in very casually dressed. She was a little embarrassed about coming to The White House and seeing the president when she was not properly attired. But they hit it off. They had an extraordinary conversation about the Constitution and the role of the courts. It was a masterclass.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was someone I had looked up to for a long time—as a young lawyer, and throughout my time practicing and teaching law. She believed that the Constitution had to be interpreted as providing for the equal rights of men and women. She understood there were certain assumptions in the law that favored or disfavored men as well as women, and had the brilliant insight that she could demonstrate that lack of equality by litigating on behalf of men.

Her great gift was not only being a brilliant lawyer, litigator and judge, but also a warm and empathetic human being. She felt the loss of respect and rights that her clients felt. And she felt compelled to try to right those wrongs.

This is a devastating personal loss for so many. But more than that, it is a devastating loss for our country. Her memory is already a blessing. May it also be a call to continue her work for justice and equality under the law.

Barbra Streisand

Singer, actress, director, founder of [The Streisand Foundation](#)

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a giant of the Supreme Court. She was an inspiration to legal scholars and women. Justice Ginsburg, paraphrasing her own words, was Jewish, a woman and a mother—and she burst through at least three glass ceilings as such. She will live in history forever. As for her replacement, Mitch McConnell set the precedent: no nominees can be confirmed this close to an election. Let the voters decide.

Dr. Jane Goodall

Founder of the Jane Goodall Institute, UN Messenger of Peace

It is with great sorrow that we lose someone of the caliber of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a lifelong advocate in action who fought for justice and the best of our humanity every single day. Her life reflected one of integrity, perseverance, and endless commitment to the work of inclusion and equity for every individual under the law.

Her story is not unlike my own, not unlike yours perhaps. Ginsburg was a young woman from Brooklyn with intense passion who knew that her dreams were bigger than the limitations of her time. She brilliantly demonstrated that when we act with intention and never give up, it is possible to change the world.

Justice Ginsburg fought for a science-based response to climate change, civil rights, inclusion and gender equality—for women, for people of color, for the LGBTQ+ community—and her life represents one of my most important reasons for hope: the indomitable human spirit.

Kimberlé Crenshaw

Cofounder and executive director of the African American Policy Forum; professor of law at UCLA and Columbia Law School; host of Intersectionality Matters podcast

From my Facebook post, June 16th, 2014: *Proof that you're not too jaded to geek? Try this: I'm at the Supreme Court tonight at a dinner hosted by Justice Ginsburg. Eyes both downcast when we meet, I say who I am, and she says, "Oh, I know YOU!" smiling, shaking my hand. "Yes, I've read your articles." I'm thinking, like, did she really say articles, as in more than one? And this was...a good thing?, I'm wondering. Yes...seems to be. She is still smiling while I'm searching for something to say. So at that point, I'm*

just...done. Nothing remotely academic or legal came to mind. I had that stupid teenager-meets-rock-star kind of speechlessness. Honored. Incredulous. Wishing I could say, "Could you repeat that for my Mom to hear?" I was feeling too silly to do anything but stand there, like I said GEEKING! Arggh, I can't think even now about what I should have said. I guess we're never too old to be reduced to silly putty in front of people we deeply admire.

I wish I could say that in the years since I've come to some conclusion about what I might have said to the Notorious RBG at that dinner. I was so starstruck that I couldn't recall even a basic pointer on small talk: to pick up points of commonality and muddle through.

After all, RBG and I had plenty of common reference points. We both graduated from Cornell, matriculated to Harvard Law School, found our way — against the odds—to joining the faculty at Columbia Law School, and ended up at the ACLU Women's Rights Project. To boot, I had enjoyed swapping stories with my colleague Jane Ginsburg about growing up with path-breaking, hardworking, non-cooking, moms.

Despite all these openings, my glibness escapes me even in my post-hoc imagination of that dinner in 2014. Why? I guess the question that all of us face in the presence of towering change agents like Justice Ginsburg, is: "Do I measure up?" In this current moment of reflection and activation, that is the question for all of us—the entire industry of social justice thinkers, activists, advocates and academics—who have inherited the legacy that RBG and accomplices like Pauli Murray left for us.

Are we really up to the challenge of doing more than passing honorific words over her deeds? Can we carry the great weight of figuring out how to steer our society back from the brink, to find a clear pathway to that democracy that we might have had if the gender and race barriers that RBG and others faced had crumbled more fully? Do *we* measure up?

Justice Ginsburg's calls for justice, often blunted by a conservative majority, ring excruciatingly true today, especially when it comes to our threatened democracy. The challenges are so big that we might all feel small by comparison. But even here, her modesty in setting forth her own epitaph is instructive: "[I want to be remembered as] someone who used whatever talent she had to do her work to the very best of her ability, and to help repair tears in her society."

This is a benchmark that we can all will ourselves to meet.

Kirsten Gillibrand

Democratic New York Senator, Founder of [Off the Sidelines](#)

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was an icon, a legend and one of the greatest role models of our time. When she went to law school, she was one of just nine women in her class of 500. She refused to be limited by the expectations of society and pushed back against the reality of her time. She wanted to use the brains that God had given her to make a difference.

She was a true trailblazer. She took herself to places few women had ever been. And she took the law to places it had never been. She stood for all of us. She stood against discrimination in all its forms. She was someone who fundamentally understood the gifts that people had to give this country—regardless of their sex, their gender orientation or their race or background. She knew that the words etched in stone above the entrance to the Supreme Court, "Equal Justice Under Law," were still a goal and not a given. She fought every day to make them a reality. She showed us the way forward; now her fight is ours to continue.

Cecile Richards

Author, cofounder of [Supermajority](#), former president of [Planned Parenthood](#)

The first time I went to the Supreme Court in my job as president of Planned Parenthood was back in 2007, for a case about banning certain types of abortion services. Ruth Bader Ginsburg was the only woman on the court. Here she was, barely five feet tall, no more than 100 pounds, carrying an entire gender on her shoulders. I listened as the eight male justices asked questions about the dilation of the cervix, as if they had any idea what that truly meant. It was the first time I saw up close just how much Justice Ginsburg had to deal with every day to represent us—not only women, but people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ people, and so many others whose most fundamental rights have been subject to debate in the highest court in the land. When the ruling came down, she wrote an impassioned—and prophetic—dissent, calling the Court’s ruling alarming and standing up in no uncertain terms for women’s reproductive choices.

There was something tenacious, even unstoppable, about Justice Ginsburg. It seemed like she could make it through anything, and she fought until her last breath. It’s hard to believe she is gone from this earth. She was a warrior, a freedom fighter, a badass until the very end. She did so much for so many, and there is so much left to do. That, as she would probably remind us, is where We the People come in.

Carol Moseley Braun

Former U.S. Senator for Illinois and U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand; first African American woman to be elected to the U.S. Senate; campaigned for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2003

The influence of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the status of women in American society cannot be overstated. She was to the equality of women as Dr. Martin Luther King was to the equality of Black people in the United States. Her legal career, taken as a whole, moved the society to reject centuries of second-class citizenship for women. She did so with courage, persistence, perseverance and a keen understanding of the possibilities of the law.

She was not content with the status quo when it meant disparity of treatment and unfairness to people who are female. She understood the essential humanity of us all, and step by step, case by case, ruling by ruling, removed the shackles that had defined the status of women for generations.

Her phenomenal intellect made her a perfect advocate. She took a difficult path, but transformed American society and the expectations the community had of the half of its population that is female. Her influence as a legal scholar and jurist made it possible for American women to become equal citizens under the law. She helped our society to move in the direction of its founding vision of equality for all people before the law. She helped perfect the Constitution.

As much to the point, she was a dreamer who saw the essential humanity in all people and elevated the status of women more than any other person of her generation. As a person who is both Black and female, it is my life experience that both those conditions can be limiting and a cause of others' antipathy. Justice Ginsburg understood that these aspects of personhood stand in the way of an individual's ability to experience the fullness of their existence and limit the contributions they can make to the community as a whole. These limitations contradict the notion in America that all people are created equal. Justice Ginsburg actually made a difference and changed the law and the society in the direction of an expansion of liberty.

She will be missed, but has left an enduring mark and legacy. Her advocacy will mean my granddaughter will have a chance to have a better life than my

grandmother did. The Notorious RBG will be the reason generations of American women will be free.

Abigail Disney

Filmmaker, philanthropist, activist, Emmy-winning director, president and CEO of [Fork Films](#), Cofounder of [Level Forward](#) and [Peace Is Loud](#)

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was the soul of social change. She saw injustice and she didn't let it drop. She looked into her deepest self and found which of her gifts could be useful in the fight. And, oh my goodness, did she have gifts. Every woman, everywhere, is lucky to have had her fighting for us, both before and during her Supreme Court tenure. If we want to show her our gratitude, we will have to give our all to keep up the fight with the kind of intelligence, ferocity, and grace she brought to it during her long and remarkable life.

Melinda Gates

Co-chair of the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), founder of [Pivotal Ventures](#)

At the core of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's extraordinary life was a simple conviction: "Women belong," she said, "in all places where decisions are being made."

She was a brilliant jurist, an inimitable Supreme Court justice, a force for equality and integrity—and she was one of my heroes. There will never be another RBG, but we are a much better, fairer country for all that she gave us.

Carol Jenkins

Co-president and CEO of [The ERA Coalition](#) and [Fund for Women's Equality](#)

I have a seven-year-old granddaughter who earlier this year determined that she wants to be Ruth Bader Ginsburg. In fact, she says, she will be “Sophie Ginsburg.” The very notion that a small Black girl who lives in Harlem, New York, can so fully understand and appreciate the life and work of the 87-year-old Justice speaks to the universality of Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s ideas of fairness.

My work is centered on equality, so Justice Ginsburg has long been a touchstone for me. I admired her brain, loved that she had a sense of humor and appeared in operas, was jealous of her workout—and trusted her sensitivity to those left out of the Constitution. I believe she truly understood, as so few do, what that means.

I saw her in real life only once. I was a total fangirl. In late 2018 I attended, with my ERA Coalition teammate, a screening of the film *On the Basis of Sex*—a rather glamorous feature film about the Justice—at the National Archives. It was followed by a conversation between RBG and NPR’s Nina Totenberg. We were entranced by the telling of her lifetime of work for gender equality, including for the ERA.

We took as our guests to the screening two Virginia state legislators who were then working for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in their state. One was House Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy, the lead sponsor of the bill. Jennifer, who reveres Justice Ginsburg, was a direct recipient of her legal mastery. She was one of the first women to graduate from the Virginia Military Institute—an experience made possible by Ginsburg’s prevailing 1996 opinion that opened the school to women.

Carroll Foy successfully carried the bill through in January of this year—giving us the 38th and final state needed for ratification of the ERA. And she has just announced her candidacy for governor of the state of Virginia. If she wins, she will be the country's first Black woman governor.

Long will live the works of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, reverberating through generations of women to come. A true tribute to her contribution to gender equality will be to successfully conclude the long campaign for the ERA—in her name.

Kathy Najimy

Activist, actor, producer, director, writer

Sometimes we just need to see it and hear it... *to believe we can be it*. For millions of womxn, RBG was the *possibility* that we *saw and heard*. This brilliant but accessible human, who believed in justice thoroughly, made it her life's work to advance and spread it. And she was funny. AND smart. *And* a family woman, and a working woman. Ruth Bader Ginsburg designed her life to reflect her unflappable dedication to justice. She even found a job which included that word in the job description, one that became her proper title: Supreme Court **Justice** Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Thank you for securing the legal rights to our, and our daughters and all American womxn's bodies, our rights to who and how we love, for gifting us attainable reach, and for doing it all with confidence, wit, brilliance and grace.

Eleanor Holmes Norton

U.S. Congresswoman representing the District of Columbia

Justice Ginsburg's brilliance made her a leader on the Supreme Court even when she dissented, but she was making new law long before she was able to do so as a Justice.

I introduced Justice Ginsburg at her Senate hearing when she was nominated by President Bill Clinton. There, I spoke of her historic achievements even before she served on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. I was assistant legal director at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) when Justice Ginsburg founded the ACLU Women's Rights Project, though she was not a paid member of the staff. There, she did some of her most historic work, including her successful argument before the Supreme Court that established the now axiomatic principle that the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause applies to women.

Although a feminist in her quest for equality for women, her principled understanding of equal treatment led to her victory in the Supreme Court case that held that male caregivers should have the same benefits as women in that role.

Justice Ginsburg's towering intellect made her a leader on the Supreme Court. Her path-breaking work as a lawyer made her a leader in the law itself.

Tina Tchen

President and CEO of [TIME'S UP Now](#)

Every one of us who is able to enjoy more rights today than our mothers did has Ruth Bader Ginsburg to thank for it. It is heartbreaking to lose such a trailblazing leader. In this painful moment, we must ask ourselves, "What

would Ruth do?" The answer is, she would fight—and that fight starts with voting.

Voting yourself—and making sure you work each day to ensure every eligible voter you know casts their ballot before the election ends on November 3—is the most important thing you can do to fight for equality and justice, like Justice Ginsburg did for us every single day on the Court. No matter where you live, your voice and your vote has never mattered more.

Valerie Jarrett

Author; senior advisor to Barack Obama, the [Obama Foundation](#) and [ATTN](#); senior distinguished fellow at the University of Chicago Law School; board chair of [When We All Vote](#) and co-chair of [The United State of Women](#)

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was an indefatigable champion for equality and justice, while tenaciously crashing through one glass ceiling after another herself. I began following her remarkable career over 35 years ago when I was a young lawyer, and she was fighting to prevent discrimination against women. By her example, she inspired me and millions of women across our country to not accept the status quo, but to do our part to demand a more perfect union.

During Justice Ginsburg's tenure on the U.S. Supreme Court, she demonstrated the importance of using her brilliant legal mind to interpret the law through the prism of its impact on the lives of the American people. And she did so with humanity, decency, and mighty wit. She provided a critical voice in the fight for women's rights, LGBTQ rights, voting rights, health care rights, immigrant rights and so much more. And now we honor her legacy best by picking up her torch and continuing the good fight.

S. Mona Sinha

Chair of Fund for Women's Equality (ERA Coalition) and Women Moving Millions

I walked into President Bollinger's house on that cold January 2018 evening. There she was: Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a woman of slight stature, radiating energy and warmth. She wore her signature gloves to shake hands with the small group gathered there. We were speakers at Columbia University's first women's conference, "She Opened the Door," where she delivered the keynote address.

I approached her expecting just a handshake. "Justice Ginsburg," I said, "I am a card-carrying fan of yours." Her twinkling eyes met mine as she said, "I am a big fan of India."

She recalled her visit to India in 1994 with Justice Antonin Scalia. She had cried when she saw the Taj Mahal as she couldn't fathom how much Shah Jahan had loved Mumtaz Mahal. She spoke of her work with Chief Justice PN Bhagwati, on the relevance of applying international human rights norms to Indian laws. Undoubtedly, her efforts laid the groundwork for the passage of LGBTQIA law in India eight months after we met.

Deep in thought, RBG smiled and listened intently as I spoke about my work championing women's rights. Her speech that evening was about her love for Columbia and the law, and how life was about following simple principles of equality and opportunity. Her humor was infectious, and she was totally comfortable in a place that clearly made her happy.

I admired her deeply and followed her closely.

Justice Ginsburg, you inspired me to strive for codifying equal rights as the chair of the Fund for Women's Equality. You inspired me to produce

Disclosure, a documentary about the misrepresentation of trans people. I whooped with joy on June 16th when the Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling on LGBT worker rights, largely because of your strong arguments. When *Disclosure* debuted later that week, it was well received by a global audience post the Supreme Court decision, which shone light on the issue.

You were the epitome of brilliance, grace and wit framed in strong and unswerving values of rights, equality and justice. I will always carry your encouraging words and your warmth within me as I continue on the path of fighting for social change. Rest in Power, Rest in Love.

Jennifer Siebel Newsom

First partner of California, filmmaker, founder and chief visionary officer of [The Representation Project](#).

The loss of a leader like Ruth Bader Ginsburg is devastating. Ruth was an equal rights champion, a trailblazer, a brilliant mind, and in her own words “a flaming feminist.” She fought with clarity and heart for a world where men and women are truly equal, and where men and women are true partners—both at work and at home. She understood innately that *all* of us would be better off in that world; that in fighting for the rights of women everywhere, she was also fighting for the liberation of men from the constraints of traditional masculinity.

One of my favorite quotes of hers is, “Women will have achieved true equality when men share with them the responsibility of bringing up the next generation.” So to honor her memory, I will keep fighting for that beautiful vision of what our world could be. I am forever grateful to her and the way she inspired us to see that a better future is possible if only we are willing to put in the hard work and fight for it. In these uncertain times, it is that spirit that we must carry forward. Let us stand together, fearless,

committed to honoring her legacy and creating a better, brighter and more just and equitable future for all.

[Marianne Schnall](#) is a widely-published interviewer and journalist and author of *What Will It Take to Make a Woman President?*, *Leading the Way*, and *Dare to Be You*. She is also the founder of [Feminist.com](#) and [What Will It Take Movements](#).

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