

UB Gender Institute's Statement on the Death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

September 19, 2020

It is with deep sadness that the UB Gender Institute marks the passing of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She spent her life committed to ending discrimination in all of its forms, as she consistently delivered progressive votes on the most divisive issues of our day, such as LGBTQ rights, including same-sex marriage, abortion rights, health care, voting rights, immigration, and affirmative action. Years earlier, as director of the ACLU's Women's Rights Project, Ginsburg convinced the Supreme Court in 1975 that the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection applied not just to racial discrimination but to sex discrimination as well.

She will be remembered as one of the most important Supreme Court Justices in modern history, not just because of her contributions to the status of women in the legal profession in particular and in leadership positions more generally, but also because she embodied principled dissent and ethical decision-making. As she wrote in 2009, "although I appreciate the value of unanimous opinions, I will continue to speak in dissent when important matters are at stake."

A little over a year ago, Justice Ginsburg visited the University at Buffalo to receive an honorary doctoral degree in Law from SUNY. She was the first Supreme Court Justice to have visited UB, and she did so in the midst of receiving cancer treatment. While here, she spoke on the significance of the law; that it did not exist as "some sort of abstract exercise," but it "affects real people, and judges should be cognizant of how law affects the people that law is meant to serve."

We grieve her loss knowing how vulnerable we are in our current political climate in terms of how laws can become weaponized against our rights and our bodies. To respond to this grave reality, and to honor Ginsburg's legacy, we need to heed her words about strategy. In 1979, she told *Newsweek Magazine* that the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is "the bedrock issue." Without it, "the Supreme Court has no gun at its head."

At this time, let's mourn her loss and continue to fight for the values and ideals that she spent her life fighting for. In her dissenting opinion to the Supreme Court decision that effectively gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act, she quoted Martin Luther King Jr, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Then she added, "if there is a steadfast commitment to see the task through to completion."

It is up to us to see the task through to completion.

But let's also pause to honor her life. In the Jewish tradition, a person who dies on the High Holiday of Rosh Hashanah is considered a "Tzadik," a title given in Judaism to people considered righteous. When we consider the fact that the root word for "Tzadik" also means "justice," it's impossible to imagine a more fitting tribute to such a brilliant woman. Rest In Power, RBG.