

MOVIE REVIEW

On the Basis of Sex



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The name “Ruth Bader Ginsburg” has been on my mind recently as I am looking forward to participating in the ceremonious swearing-in before the U.S. Supreme Court. R.B.G. has also become a pop culture icon, a trend I participated in with my recent purchase of a make-up bag printed with the pattern of the famous R.B.G. dissent collar. And so, I set aside a Sunday afternoon to view the film “On the Basis of Sex” to learn more about R.B.G.’s life-story. I enthusiastically report that it was an afternoon very well spent – I found the film inspirational and would highly recommend it to any attorney, colleague, or friend.

The film covers a period of time in R.B.G.’s career beginning from her first day at Harvard Law School and continuing through her struggle to find employment upon graduation that led her to a starting path in academia. The film ends with the oral arguments before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit in *Moritz*, a tax case in which R.B.G., along with her husband Marty (and the ACLU), challenged the gender-based distinction that prevented their client from claiming a caregiver tax deduction for the care of his ailing mother. Defining moments showing R.B.G.’s passion for

fighting against gender discrimination for society as a whole build upon instances where she herself faced situations permeated by gender stereotyping (such as the Harvard Dean’s opening speech as to what it means to be a “Harvard Man”). While focusing on her legal career, the film also provides glimpses into R.B.G.’s private life and struggles as a wife and mother, to which a broader audience may relate, such as her husband Marty’s recovery from testicular cancer and her daughter Jane’s rebellious teenager phase.

R.B.G. was portrayed as struggling not only with the negativity arising from gender stereotyping, but also battling with that universal human emotion of self-doubt as she prepared for oral arguments before the Tenth Circuit. In this film, R.B.G.’s nervousness was palpably compounded by her deep desire for a result that would make major strides in her calling, gender equality law,

in the context of her realistic consideration of her lack of experience in giving such oral arguments. The film casts R.B.G.’s internal self-doubt against the backdrop of the doubts planted by society (of her capability as a woman) and of her fellow attorneys who expressed their own doubts about her lack of experience (one even suggesting she was not a “real lawyer”). As I hit the bottom of the popcorn bag, this film had me rooting for the small but mighty R.B.G. as she faced the daunting experience of the Tenth Circuit oral arguments.

Soon, I will be on my flight to the Capital for the U.S. Supreme Court swearing-in, my anticipation mounting for the great honor and memory of R.B.G.’s presence. And in my carry-on bag will be my next venture into learning more about this hero for justice, this time in print, the book “In My Own Words,” which captures this legacy in R.B.G.’s own words. ♦

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